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THE WHITE CIPHER

HENRY LEVERAGE

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Fay pressed Dutch Gus over the rail and down toward the murky flood of the Thames

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THE WHITE CIPHER

BY

HENRY LEVERAGE

AUTHOR OF "WHISPERING WIRES"

NEW YORK

MOFFAT, YARD & COMPANY

1919

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TO

"A WILD STAR"

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THE WHITE CIPHER

CHAPTER I

THE OPEN GATE

SWIRLED in the maze of a slow awakening, dropped through an abyss from zenith to nadir, the prisoner came out of his dreams and stared through the bars of his door to the pearl gray of the coming dawn.

C-45 — better known in international underworld circles as Chester Fay, alias Edward Letchmere — was serving ten years at hard labor for the crime, committed against the peace and dignity of the country, of opening — by means unguessed by Scotland Yard — a jeweler's strong-box in Hatton Gardens; which is, aside from "The Old Lady of Threadneedle Street," the strictest patrolled district in the city of London.

Chester Fay, alias Edward Letchmere, studied the crack of dawn as it crept over the man-made barricade, through the slotted windows of the great gray cell block, and bathed the harsh walls of the prison with the rosy light of pearl changed into ruby and from ruby into gold.

And there was something prophetic in the mellow magic of the chromatic changes in the English sky!

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A bell clanged at the front of the prison. A key grated in a lock. An iron door opened. Shuffling feet sounded, like an old woman's in a lane. C-45 lowered the edge of his shoddy blanket — stamped here and there with the broad arrow — and watched where the grated bars of the door formed tiny crosses against the dull gray of the wall.

The shuffling came nearer the cell. It stopped. A key clicked against another. The footfalls were resumed. A surly beef-and-beer face blotted out the light from the corridor as Chester Fay raised himself upon his hinged shelf.

"C-45?" inquired the turnkey.

"Y—es," breathed Fay.

The aged turnkey squinted at the paper he held in trembling fingers. He eyed the door number and blinked his matted lashes.

"C-45," he said, "get your clothes on. Y're going hout!"

Had the slaty roof of the stony coffin, which he had learned to call home, fallen down upon him, Fay would not have been more surprised. He twisted his lithe body, touched his bare toes to the cold stones of the flagging, and stood erect, the heart within his breast throbbing like an imprisoned bird.

The red, peering face beyond the bars, the tiny rimmed eyes with their matted lashes, the thick purple lips, the bulbous nose of the turnkey, represented British justice carried to the furthermost limit of caution and concern for His Majesty's prisoners.

Fay had hated this guard over the five years at

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Dartmoor as he had hated the gruel and molasses served in the morning, the stew at noon, or the gummy oakum piled in the cell to be picked strand by strand in an unending drudgery.

Now this "screw," so called by the inmates of Dartmoor, had delivered the sweetest words ever dropped into human ears. Fay never knew how he dressed on that morning. It was done. He waited and pressed his slender body against the latticed bars, with his ears straining to catch the iron music of the thrown bolt.

The great key turned. The door swung open. Fay glided out from his cell and stood at attention with his fingers touching against the seams of his dirt-gray prison trousers.

The guard locked the door. He peered at the paper he held. He squinted at the number upon the stone over the doorway, then he motioned Fay to follow him up the long corridor of the white-flagged cell block.

The prisoner followed the burly form of his keeper. He threw back his keen-cut face while his eyes lighted with a sanguine fire that burned clear through the gloom to the iron door of liberty.

This door swung open after a signal was passed between guard and keeper. Prisoners pressed white faces to the many bars of the place. A whisper ran from cell to cell. The American was going free! They watched Fay as he passed through the arch and sank back into their narrow coffins as the great door clanged.

Fay waited, breathed silently, compressed his lips, then followed the guard along a narrow hallway and

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into an open court, whose one high-barred gate was flanked by two castellated towers upon which sentries stood with rifles swung under their arms.

MacKeenon, of Scotland Yard, stood in the very center of the courtyard. At the inspector's feet a yellow kit-bag rested. Over the Scot's right arm a plaid overcoat hung. Within the detective's light-blue eyes there sparkled the dry twinkle of recognition.

Chester Fay moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue. He hesitated, then advanced step by step. He had last seen Inspector MacKeenon on the witness dais of the September Assizes. It was the Scot's testimony concerning a certain finger-print which had carried the staid British jury. Such a trifle!

A sandy-colored hand crept up to MacKeenon's chin and covered his mouth. The eyes closed to narrow slits. It was like a sly old dog warning another, not so sly, not near so old. Chester Fay understood. He turned toward the turnkey who had brought him out.

"Follow me, sir," he heard him say.

The way led across the courtyard, through a low stone arch and into a Bertillon room, then to where a cold shower splashed upon well-scoured flags. The turnkey pointed to the descending water. Fay stripped, tossed the hated clothes away from him, lathed his lean, long-limbed body and mopped his silver-gray hair. It had been brown when he had entered the castellated gate, five long years before the unexpected coming of Inspector MacKeenon.

The clothes the turnkey brought had evidently come out of the yellow kit-bag. They fitted. They were of

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price and rich texture. There were also the little things which a gentleman carries — a flat, gold watch, a set of studs and cuff-links, a pearl pin and a neat cigarette case which contained six cigarettes.

Fay accepted all these things with the abstract air of one born lucky. He did not understand the meaning of it all. Discharged prisoners, or those released by order of the Home Secretary, were fitted with H.M.P. garments made of shoddy by piece-work convicts whose hearts were elsewhere when they worked.

"Hall ready, sir?" asked the red-faced guard with strange civility.

Fay lifted his slender shoulders slightly, adjusted his cuffs, touched his cravat and faced the light which streamed in through the Bertillon room. He did not answer the turnkey. The sovereign contempt of a caged eagle was in his glance.

He drew down his plaid cap which matched so well the suit of tweeds, lowered his chin and followed the turnkey out into the glad light of dawning day and across the stone-flagged yard to MacKeenon's side.

A prison clerk — one of those rat-eyed trusties whom nobody trusts — hurried out from the Principal Keeper's office with an oblong of printed paper. He passed this release to MacKeenon.

The inspector signed it with the butt of a badly chewed indelible pencil, glanced at Fay, then said distinctly — too distinctly:

"A receipt for C-45. Yea, he may b'back. Ye canna tell!"

To the man who had prowled the world like a tiger

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a jungle — to the third cracksman living who could open a modern cannon-ball safe or stop the four circular tumblers of a strong-box in their correct position — this sly aside of MacKeenon's was enlightening. The old gray dog, whose scent was keener than a Louisiana bloodhound's, was baying down the trail again for some wolf-pack of the underworld.

Chester Fay set his pale face and fingered his cravat. He dropped his hands to his side and followed the inspector out through a rising gate, where the two men stood facing the misted moorland and the spiring towers of Princetown beyond the causeway. As they stood there a clang sounded behind. It was the turnkey bringing down the shutter of iron.

A sleeve-valved motor, black, tired with steel-studded rubber, throbbing with life and a desire to roll up the road, stood close at hand. Into the tonneau of this car MacKeenon tossed the kit-bag and overcoat, then turned and assisted Fay to mount the running-board, where he had hesitated for the minutest fraction of a second.

Liberty was over that causeway. Freedom might be gained by a try at the marshes and moorland. The mist was almost thick enough to hide in. The world beyond was very wide indeed. The chance which offered might never come again. Fay had lost opportunity too often not to weigh well the one that came to him.

He felt the Inspector's fingers on his sleeve. They seemed gentle. There was that, however, in the gripping mystery of his release that savored of things to come.

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Perhaps, after all, the man from the Yard had other plans than the underworld. Perhaps the release had to do with the great war which had finally been brought to an end. It would be easy to escape, for Fay had the lithe, long limbs of the runner.

But he thought better of it and stepped through the tonneau door where MacKeenon had assisted him. The surge, as the car leaped forward and the driver glided through second, third and into fourth speed, was just sufficient to cause him to sit down upon the seat, where the inspector, with solicitude, offered one half of an auto robe whose woolen texture felt like silk to a man who had slept under shoddy for five years.

The mist-shrouded moors were crossed over rumbling bridges of planks or hollow arches of stone. The main highway, which swung from west to east upon the troubled isle, was reached. Into this broad road the driver turned the great car, stepped upon the governor-throttle and opened wide the triple-jetted carburetor.

A hissing of indrawn air sounded. The wind of their swift passage struck back and cut the cuticle of Fay's white cheeks. They flushed and reddened with the rush of warm blood up through his sagged veins. He felt then the sweet wine of life and living — the clean vision and promise of the open places.

He sat in one position, turning over and over the riddle of his sudden freedom. It was like being reborn — rejuvenated.

MacKeenon had said no word. He crouched like a watchful hound, ready, alert for the first overt act.

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Fay had weighed the chances when he had first entered the car. They still held good. The great motor often slowed for traffic — for the tide of war which flowed Londonward, even after the last treaty of peace had been signed.

Lorries, caissons, embarked troops in olive-drab invalided officers and men strolling through the rare English meadows, all were a maelstrom where freedom from pursuit could be had.

Fay feared no living man or group of men. He had played the underworld game according to his code. It had been a losing one, perhaps; but he had held it down to the last grim brush with the hounds of the law in the Court of Assizes. He had not whimpered. He had not squealed. There was that rat, Dutch Gus, and that pigeon, Nelly Blake, who might have stuck by a pal. They were gone now with their telltale eyes and their overextended sympathies.

Also, for he had played many parts, there was Saidee Isaacs. Where was she now? She had been different. A hell-cat, perhaps, but then Saidee was a man's girl and a lady. Had she gone up or down during the five years at Dartmoor? Fay rather thought, as he gripped the rare leather of the car's upholstery, that Saidee would be found in West London. Could she have anything to do with his release?

MacKeenon, alone, could answer this riddle. He turned his chin slightly and studied the cold face of the Scotch inspector. There was no light in his eyes. He sat half on the edge of the seat. His toes touched the rug on the tonneau floor. He was prepared to

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spring or clap on a pair of nippers. He was the personification of British watchfulness and sagacity.

The detective had played his hand, five years before, in taking advantage of information. He had told the truth on the witness dais, as he knew it. He had not enlarged on the damning evidence. It had been large enough. Down in his heart Fay did not blame MacKeenon for testifying as he did. It had sent him away, but then it was part of the game. It was an added corollary to the ancient axiom: "A sleuth can make a thousand mistakes and yet may get his quarry — the quarry dare not afford to overlook the smallest trifle."

Noon passed. Night drew its shade across the eastern world. The long, black motor car hurtled on without being stopped, without question from the decorated officers who regulated the traffic.

There was a hidden magic in the H.M.S. plates which hung from the front axle and the rear trunk rack. There was a keen hand at the wheel who knew the turns and the signals. He drove as if the weight of an empire depended on getting to his destination.

Chester Fay, letting slip a hundred chances for escape, found himself in the gripping clutch of the unknown which lay before him. MacKeenon had a plan in the back of his long Scotch head. Its very uncertainty gripped the cracksman in a passive nip of steel.

The inspector would talk, yes. Fay believed that he would discuss the weather, the earth and the

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heaven above, without betraying the one thing which was hurling them eastward at racing speed.

This thing was the reason for taking a prisoner out of the living hell of Dartmoor before the long years of penance had been up. It was unusual; it was extraordinary save in the case where a crook squealed and turned Crown's evidence.

The Scotch inspector most certainly knew that he had no such man to deal with!

The reaching fringe of London was entered. The sky grew pale. Dusk fell with the great roaring car brightening the asphalt road ahead with flickering, dancing electrics of tremendous candle-power.

Hyde Park Corner was reached. Piccadilly lay ahead. Sombre mansions reared on either hand. A hospital, bright with the flags of the victorious Allies, was passed with closed muffler. The car swerved toward the Thames. The lamps were dimmed as the Embankment loomed with its monuments. The brakes went on.

Fay gripped his oakum-stained nails deep within the palms of his white hands. He had a premonition that his destination was to be New Scotland Yard. Prisoners were sometimes taken there for interrogation.

The house the car stopped at, with a final clamp of the brakes on the rear wheels, was inconspicuous among its neighbors. It was smug and staid and held the air of secret things. A faint light shone through the closed blinds on the ground floor. Two iron lions guarded the top of a small flight of well scoured steps. A constable of the Metropolitan Police Force stood

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at attention as the driver shifted his lever to neutral and touched the black vizor of his cap.

MacKeenon set his lips and opened the tonneau door on the right-hand side of the car. The inspector rolled up the lap-robe, handed Fay the overcoat and lifted the kit-bag. He paused for the cracksman to rise.

Chester Fay felt the creeping fingers of the detective. They strayed over his tweed sleeve and gripped his elbow with no mean strength. They were like hound's teeth feeling for a grip.

"Ye coom with me," said MacKeenon dryly.

Fay raised his shoulders and stepped to the running-board. His feet glided over the curb like a quick dancer's. He followed the inspector, a quarter-step behind. They passed through an iron-grilled fence, took the salute of the constable, and reached the landing between the two lions.

A dark, stained door barred the way. Upon the right panel of this door MacKeenon knocked four times, then five; which Fay remembered, with a start, was his number at Dartmoor.

He glanced first at the kit-bag, and then turned his head slightly and finished his scrutiny of the yard and street. Freedom lay there in the gloom of London!

He tossed away what he believed was his last chance as the door opened to a crack and then wide. There was no alternative as MacKeenon's fingers gripped for a second and stronger hold. Chester Fay, alias Edward Letchmere, entered the House of the Two Lions, blindly.

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CHAPTER II

"SCOTLAND YARD"

THERE is that within the professional criminal's nature which distrusts the men who carry out the laws. The laws, themselves, may be fair, but man, in the cracksman's opinion, is a human element who is very liable to overplay his part.

Chester Fay had lain too long on the hard planks at Dartmoor to believe in MacKeenon's good intentions. The Scot had a reputation for getting results. He was also the very keen tool of brainier men who managed the Criminal Intelligence Division of Scotland Yard.

The romance of all underworld activity on the Continent and in England was bound up in the Yard. Its long arm could reach down a blind alley in Paris and snatch a man to the light of justice. It could lift a fleeing suspect from the deck of a ship at sea. It stopped at nothing!

Fay suspected a well-baited trap of the superior order as he followed MacKeenon through a dim-lighted hallway. He gripped his palms as they waited in the gloom for a door to be unlocked by the servant who had answered the inspector's knock of four taps and then five.

The room which was suddenly revealed, like the flash of a cinematograph, contained a long mahogany

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table running from wall to wall, and a half-score of heavy teak-wood chairs which blended into the rich dark finish of the wainscoting. There was little else in the way of furnishings. Fay counted three black tin boxes upon the table. Each box was marked with a code number and the initials C. I. D. His eyes lifted over these boxes and stared at a man who wore a mask which was far too small to hide a jaw so square and masterful. It brought a slight smile of recognition to the cracksman's lips.

The man in the mask was Sir Richard Colstrom, Chief of the Criminal Investigation Division!

Fay divined, with the flash thoughts of a professional, that the matter of bringing him out of Dartmoor was an important one. It could be nothing puerile with Sir Richard mixed up in the case. The chief played a high hand and played it hard.

The farce of the mask was apparent when MacKeenon softly closed the door to the hallway, turned the key, then coughed as in a signal. Sir Richard half rose from the deep chair in which he had been reclining and leaned his elbows upon the table. His finger lowered and leveled straight for Fay's steady glance.

"Remove your cap!"

Fay smiled thinly, reached upward and brought down the plaid cap which he bunched in his right hand. The silver of his hair caught the chief's eyes. Sir Richard raised his brows and glanced at MacKeenon. He said cuttingly:

"A little older — a little wiser — a little grayer than before, eh Mac?"

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"A' hae noo doot ov it."

Both men laughed at Fay's expense. The cracksman failed to see the joke. He stiffened slightly and glanced about the room. The windows were shaded and undoubtedly locked. The lamps of the place were controlled by a switch near the door which led to the hallway. This seemed to be the only entrance or exit to the room.

Sir Richard noted the result of his thrust with a steady glint in his eyes. He leaned further over the table and said:

"I had you brought to London for a reason, Fay."

The cracksman closed his fists and straightened his slender shoulders. He distrusted Sir Richard full-heartedly. There is that which exists between the police and the criminal tribes which calls for no truce. Fay was completely on his guard.

"I had you brought here," continued the Chief of Staff, "after some study of the right and the wrong in the matter. We have your record!"

Sir Richard pointed toward the south and the direction of New Scotland Yard.

"Yes, we have it," he continued slowly. "It's a criminal shame, Fay, that a man of your ability ever entered the downward path of crime. It leads nowhere, and damn fast you go. You're bucking the stream all of the time. You can't beat the law!"

Fay glanced along his tweed suit and studied the points of his well-polished shoes. They fitted so well he wondered if they had been made from his Bertillon

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measurements. He glanced up and into Sir Richard's half-hidden eyes.

"You can't beat it — clever as you are! And, however much we may enjoy enterprise and however many shilling-shockers and penny-dreadfuls we have devoured, the fact remains, Fay, that you have sadly misapplied your splendid talents."

Fay took the flattery for what he thought it was worth. He waited with every sense keen and intent.

"But for you," continued Sir Richard, shaking his index-finger, "but for you and your kind, literature would be poorer — we'll grant that —"

Fay heard MacKeenon rounding the corner of the table and fingering the locked boxes.

"We'll grant it!" snapped Sir Richard testily. "We'll grant your talents. It is because of them that we have brought you here tonight! As man to man, Fay, we're in a knot. I'm sure you are the one rogue in all the known world who can help us out. I'm going to be very candid!"

Fay said nothing.

"See these?" exclaimed Sir Richard, pointing at the boxes upon the mahogany table. "See them?"

MacKeenon stepped back into the gloom of the room. Fay followed the direction of Sir Richard's polished finger-nail. He raised his brows in polite query. He still remained mute.

"Damnit man!" said the chief of the Intelligence Division, "Wake up! Show interest! It's easy enough for us to send you back."

The cracksman acknowledged this threat by lean-

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ing closer to the boxes. He studied the cryptic numbers on their sides. He turned his head slightly and laid the plaid cap on the edge of the table.

"They'd be easy opened," he offered professionally.

"Bah! That isn't what we want. What we want is this — without mincing words. We want your coöperation. Let's be brief as time and get to the heart of the matter. These boxes, three in number, contain the secrets of the entire dye industry. They were obtained in Switzerland during the middle period of the war. They are in cipher!"

"German?" asked Fay with cold concern.

"Yes, damnit, German! No other nation could show such fiendish cunning in hiding so simple a thing. The cipher is one to which neither Scotland Yard, the Intelligence Bureau of the Army and Navy, French experts on such matters, nor the American Secret Service have been able to find the slightest clue."

Fay had the good sense to hold his tongue. Sir Richard was warming up to the problem. He shifted in his chair, glanced at MacKeenon, then toward the three boxes.

"The cipher," he said, tapping the table with his forefinger, "is either very simple or very intricate. It is no half-way affair. It has baffled all the experts!"

The cracksman eyed the locks of the boxes with professional concern. He shifted his weight from his right leg to his left foot. He yawned politely and passed his hand over his silver-gray hair. As yet no trust or warmth showed in his eyes. They were neutral.

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Sir Richard adjusted his mask and leaned forward. His eyes bored through the holes in the black velvet. "Whatever the case may be, Fay," he said, "the key for this code or cipher was in the hands of a Berlin chemist who met with a most violent death in — we will say a country north and east of here. You can guess which one it is!"

"Holland?"

"Perhaps. We'll leave the matter rest with your surmise. In this — country — north and east of here, the German chemist did one thing before he was slain. He left a small packet with the neutral nation's embassy. It was placed in their care. This packet is of vital importance to us! It is important to your own country, Fay. It is the key to the cipher locked in these three boxes."

"Well?" asked Fay as Sir Richard paused and thrust out his hand. "Well, what have I got to do with all this?"

Sir Richard doubled up his fingers and tapped the polished surface of the table with his white knuckles. He turned, threw one leg over the other and stared at MacKeenon. The Scotch inspector nodded ever so slightly. It was like a sly dog signaling another.

The air of the long room was tense as the three men faced each other. The outer roar of London sounded far away. The steady clank of the constable's feet on the hard curb was a reminder to Fay that the house was well guarded. He thawed a trifle and fastened upon Sir Richard an engaging smile which was coated with clean-cut intentiveness.

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"What have I got to do with all this?" he repeated, holding forth his hands. "You've released me — on parole. You've brought me to London. You've mentioned boxes and ciphers and dye-stuff. You want something, and yet behind me stands an officer of the law, and outside, walks another. If you want something, from me, why don't you let me go?"

The shot was delivered through clean, white teeth. The smile faded from the cracksman's lips. He leaned slightly forward and locked Sir Richard's eyes with a glance that caused the chief of the bureau to recoil slightly.

"Yes!" said Fay hotly. "Yes, Sir Richard — oh, I know you! You've gyved me! You hounded me! You threw me in that hell-hole called Dartmoor with the wooden-minded screws walking before my cell till I thought I would go mad. You saw to it that I was sent away for the limit! Now you want something, and you won't trust me away from your coppers!"

"Coppers?" asked Sir Richard removing the mask and dropping it to the table. "What are coppers, Fay?"

"Police! Screws! Guards! Turnkeys! Hell-hounds!"

Sir Richard stared at MacKeenon and motioned toward the door.

"Go out, Mac," he said, "and leave us to ourselves. I think that Fay and I can come to an understanding better that way."

The inspector hesitated, walked to the door, turned the key and passed out into the hallway.

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The door closed as Sir Richard rubbed his hands, eyed Fay with interest, and leaned back in the chair.

"Now," he said, "we are alone. I've no doubt that you can get away. In fact I'd hate to match myself against you, Fay. We have your record, you know."

"A lot of it isn't true!" said Fay bitterly. "You people are always making up things. I didn't turn that trick in Hatton Gardens. Why, do you think I'd work without gloves?"

"I didn't think so, Chester," said Sir Richard with a faint smile. "I really didn't, but I guess you did!"

"Bah!"

"Oh, now, don't take it that way. The strong-box was opened — without trace. Up over the transom was a trace — your right thumb print. It was a nice clean job, Fay. I always thought that Saidee Isaacs was with you that night." The chief leaned slightly forward. He watched the cracksman's eyes for a clue. There was none. Fay returned the stare without expression. He said staunchly:

"Miss Saidee Isaacs had no more to do with that job than you had or I had. I don't even know where Hatton Gardens is."

"That's enough! You know and I know. You've got the cunning of your tribe — admit nothing and deny everything. But I've taken an interest in you — a personal one. Things have come up —"

Sir Richard glanced at the door and then at the three boxes. He crossed his legs and drummed the table. His brow furrowed as he reached forward and fingered the velvet mask.

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"Come closer, Fay," he said confidentially. "Step around here."

Fay was frankly suspicious. He turned sharply and stared at the windows. He eyed the door behind which he sensed that MacKeenon would be crouching. He wheeled and rested his hands on the table. He leaned forward until his face was very close to Sir Richard's.

"We can talk just as well in this position," he said without moving his drawn lips. "Now, what are you getting at, chief?"

"I thought that Saidee Isaacs was in it," said Sir Richard. "I'll take my statement back. But you were, and I'm glad of it."

Fay rubbed his wrists and stared at his oakum-stained nails. He dropped his cuffs and stood back. He waited with fast beating heart. The man before him was fencing like a clever fiend. He already had drawn speech where silence was golden. Fay remembered with a pang that the Hatton Gardens affair was not the only one he had been guilty of perpetrating in the Metropolitan District of London. There was a little matter of turning a museum off in Kensington Gardens. There was the Monica affair where a diamond salesman had lost a pint of uncut stones.

Sir Richard guessed what was passing in the cracksman's mind. He smiled with sudden warmth. His head came forward as his right hand reached out. "You think this is a police trap, Fay," he said sincerely. "It isn't at all. It's an attempt to call upon the highest talent in the world — in his own particular line. We all have specialties. Mine is trying to

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raise better dahlias than my neighbor. Yours is opening strong-boxes which American safe-makers have branded as burglar-proof. That big crib in Hatton Gardens was an American box, wasn't it?"

"How should I know?" asked Fay.

"Well, it was! It was made by the Seabold people of Hartford. Guaranteed fire-proof and burglar-proof and non-pickable. It didn't burn up, but everything else happened to it."

Fay smiled openly. He liked Sir Richard better for the remark. He grew more at ease as he waited. "Well," he suggested, "I'm here with you, and you've got something for me to do. I can guess that much. Does it concern a Seabold safe?"

"It most certainly does!"

Fay stared at the three boxes. He furrowed his brow. They were not part of any American safe he had ever known. They were more like the tin-cases which middle-aged drabs carried about the Law Courts or the Brokerage Houses. Their locks could have been opened with a hairpin.

"You'll have to explain, chief."

Sir Richard swung open his coat and drew from the inner pocket a small note-book. He thumbed the pages and paused at one. "Seabold Safe Corporation, Limited," he said. "They placed a number of their strong-boxes in England and the Continent. Their salespeople were very enterprising. We have a record, from their own files, of seven. Four of the seven were smaller than the one in Hatton Gardens. The lock, or whatever it is called, was different."

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Sir Richard glanced up and then buried his nose between the pages of the note-book.

"Two of the larger," he said musingly, "were installed in Paris. They're there yet. The one that interests us is in the country — north and east of here. It is the same size and general dimensions as the unfortunate one you opened in Hatton Gardens. I understand the situation is similar — parallel. It would be ridiculously easy for a man of your talent to go to this country, north and east of here, and open that strong-box — without trace."

Sir Richard snapped the book shut and glanced up at Fay.

The cracksman slightly moistened his lips. The cat was out of the bag! The reason for MacKeenon's visit to Dartmoor — the release when five years were yet to be served — the sudden interest of Sir Richard Colstrom, were all explained. England, who had severely punished him, now wanted a favor done.

The two men exchanged a glance of mutual understanding. Fay's mind worked swiftly. He went over the details of his arrest. He recalled the method he had used in opening the great safe in Hatton Gardens. No other man could have done it, save by bungling.

"Suppose," he said, feeling surer of his ground. "Suppose, Sir Richard, we will say that I can go to Holland and open that box — without trace. What would there be in it for me?"

"Ah, we're getting on!"

"I'm not so sure that we are getting anywhere, for what would happen to me if I were lagged in

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Holland? Suppose somebody tipped me off? What then?"

"You and I alone know what you are going to do."

"MacKeenon?"

"He obeys orders. I like you, Fay. Damnit, I admire enterprise — even if it is opening strong-boxes! What would Scotland Yard be if there weren't men like you in the world? You're a mark and all that, but you've done one or two big things in your line."

Fay rubbed his wrists as if handcuffs were still binding him. He shifted his weight and eyed the three boxes with new concern. "My price," he said, "may be more than you or England are willing to pay."

"No price is too high to pay for the key to this cipher." Sir Richard jerked a thumb toward the black boxes. "The secret for making these dyes will save the world from a galling monopoly. It will make the place we live in, Fay, just that much safer for Democracy. The war between nations is over. There will come another war — the commercial one between Germany and the world. We can best win that war by being prepared — by dye-works and potash deposits and freedom from secret formulae."

Fay nodded at this statement. "My country — America — is interested in this?" he asked.

"Yes and no! Your country shares with England in every discovery. This set of boxes which contain the cipher were obtained in Switzerland at a high cost. Three of our men were waylaid and killed. Two more were trapped in a Berne hotel and had to

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fight their way out. The German chemist who offered the dye secrets — at a price — is dead by poison. We got the boxes through. They contain the full details of manufacturing thirty-six of the principal dyes. They are in a baffling cipher which has held us up."

"And the key to this cipher is in the Holland safe?"

"We believe so. A friend of the man who was poisoned brought the key out and across the German border. He was followed by German agents. He was in danger of his life. What was more natural than an appeal to the embassy? They took the key, placed it in their safe, and waited for instructions. In the meantime the man was stabbed to death in broad daylight, near the Schwartz Canal. His pockets were rifled! His clothes were torn from his body!"

"Sounds like a pleasant commission," said Fay dryly.

"You'll tackle it?"

Fay eyed Sir Richard, then reached for his cap.

"Does it mean my freedom?" he asked as he fingered the visor.

"It certainly does, Chester! That little bit you did in Dartmoor never happened. You were sent away, wrong. I'll answer for the Home Secretary. We can arrange everything! Come now — can we call upon you to go to that country, north and east of here, and open the embassy's vault without compromising us or without leaving a trace? All we want is the key to the cipher. If you're not willing to make a try for it — then —"

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Sir Richard hesitated and rose from his chair. He stood with his hands clasping the edge of the table. His jaw was thrust forward like a block. His eyes hardened to points of tempered steel. They bored toward the cracksman. "Take your pick, Fay!" he said in a last appeal.

"Pick of what?"

"Getting the key to the cipher or going back to Dartmoor!"

"There's no alternative," said Fay with a rare smile. "I'll turn the trick for you and England! If I don't turn the trick, without trace and without compromise, then I'll knock on the big gate at the prison and ask to be taken in. Is that satisfactory, Sir Richard Colstrom?"

"I never had the slightest doubt of you," said the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Division.

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CHAPTER III

"THE CIPHER"

CHESTER FAY watched the stout form of the Chief of Division as he crossed the room, tapped lightly on the door which led to the hallway, then waited with his fingers toying with a heavy, gold chain which crossed a vest the color of old wine.

MacKeenon turned the knob and came into the room. He closed and locked the door at Sir Richard's suggestion. He sniffed the air of the room, glanced keenly toward Fay, then said:

"Ye have come to an understanding?"

"We have!" declared Sir Richard. "Fay is with us. You know what that means? We are bound to get the key and trick the Germans."

"A' hae noo doot ov it," said the Scotch detective, rubbing his hands and peering for a second time at the cracksman. "A verra gude mon — but a wee bit reckless."

Sir Richard laughed pleasantly. "Oh, we're all that way — more or less. I guess it was recklessness that broke the Hindenburg Line. It would never have been done if we had counted the cost."

Fay moved around the end of the table and stood by the three black boxes. He studied the situation from every angle. It was possible to escape. It was

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not too late to go back on his bargain with Sir Richard. A swift rush, the bowling over of the two detectives, and a plunge through the shrubbery of the house would carry him to westward, where quiet, shaded lamps and reaching aisles of mansions would offer freedom for all time.

He waited to hear more. The gripping mystery of the cipher clutched and stilled his desire for liberty. There would be other chances at a later hour.

There was something of the American in Sir Richard. Fay watched the two detectives come across the room, take seats at the table and then pull toward themselves the locked boxes.

"We'll begin at the beginning," said the chief, glancing up at the ceiling and then into Fay's eyes. "Take a seat, Chester, right here! I want to explain to you about the cipher and the dye business."

Fay turned and gripped the ornate arms of a teak-wood chair which had certainly come from India in one of the old hulks. He turned this chair so that the light from the overhead cluster would shine in the faces of the two detectives and leave his in shadow. It was an old trick!

He sat down, pulled up the knees of his tweed trousers and leaned slightly forward in an attitude of attention. Sir Richard had already drawn a small key from his pocket. This key was evidently the one to the three locks of the boxes.

"What do you know about German dyes?" snapped the chief as he held out the key. "Know anything at all, Fay?"

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"I've heard of fast-black."

"Is that all?"

"About all, Chief. I suppose the Germans have gone deeper into the subject than most men. I thought the States had made some new discoveries. You see I didn't get much chance to read in the last place I was in. The subject of reading for occasional offenders should be called to the attention of the Home Secretary."

"I'll mention it," said Sir Richard dryly. "I might add that the Home Secretary and I have spent three months on this damn cipher."

Fay leveled his shaded eyes toward the boxes. He glanced at Sir Richard. There was a frown on the chief's face and an angry pucker about his strong mouth.

"Three months, on a cipher! Let me see it, Chief."

Sir Richard turned toward MacKeenon. "Better get up and stand by the windows when I open these boxes," he said. "We can't be too careful. There is a billion pounds involved in this!"

Fay was impressed for the first time since leaving the sombre walls of Dartmoor. Sir Richard was no man to exaggerate. He might have had the treasure of the Diamond Clique as he reached, pulled a box close up to his side, inserted the key and slowly lifted the sheet-metal lid.

The cracksman leaned out of the shadow and into the light. Sir Richard laid the key upon the polished surface of the table, thrust his fingers inside the box and drew out a sheet of white paper. He held this

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sheet so that Fay could read the top lines. They were:

"SCHUCKER — MAINTZ — WERKE — FRANKFORT ON MAIN — BERLIN"

Underneath this heading was an even row of ten-point letters, the first of which ran:

"aaahhhsssaaacccstopxxxgggsssttttstopmmmwwwccc
pppfffbbbstopxxxzzzccceeesssuuukkkwwwsssttttst
opyyynnnvvvfffssshhhstopmmmtttnnnpppwwwfffccc"

Fay counted thirty-two rows of similar letters, between the lines of which were double spaces of blank white. He turned to the box as Sir Richard replaced the sheet and snapped down the lid.

"They're all like that," said the chief bitterly. "It's a clever, clever cipher. A cipher that runs through ten reams of paper. There's all of six hundred thousand letters in the thing. There's at least thirty or forty thousand words. The whole will give us the formulae to such dyes as Alizarine Sapphire and Carbanthrene Blue."

"Might be the names of sleeping cars," said Fay.

"They're much-wanted dyes! The man who was slain in Switzerland said the formulae to these two colors would be found in the boxes. They may be there, but we haven't found them!"

MacKeenon lowered a blind and turned. He sniffed with the scent of a baffled hound. The pouches at the side of his cheeks dropped, his teeth showed beneath curled gums. Fay wheeled upon him suddenly and was startled at the inspector's appearance. It was as if the old dog had snarled in silence.

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"We'll continue," broke in Sir Richard as he shoved the box upon the table. "The game isn't lost! There's a key to the cipher in the embassy."

"Have you tried everything?" asked Fay. "How about these cipher experts? I've heard they can cipher anything. There's a Russian in Dartmoor who used to talk to the whole gallery by tapping on his bars. All you had to know was the key-word and deduct the numbers it represented from the numbers he sent. The quotient would be the message."

"We've tried that," snapped Sir Richard. "Believe me, Fay, that was the first thing tried. It's the Nihilist key-word cipher! Fifty of the keenest brains in Europe and America have worked on this thing. It does not follow Bacon's biliteral cipher or Poe's cryptograph. It has some of the marks of an old Italian cipher used in the time of Pope Alexander. It isn't that! It has already driven one professor of mathematics mad. He cross-indexed it and tried it backward. He found a queer average in the repetition of certain letters. They followed no sane rule. For that reason he went insane. More may go mad if this thing isn't solved. It represents the final triumph over Germany — the winning of the commercial war which is upon us!"

Fay drew his head back into the shadow. He still retained the ringing timbre of Sir Richard's voice. The energetic chief of the Intelligence Division had once been on a mission to the States. He had learned much that was American on that visit.

"Damnit!" he heard Sir Richard blurt. "We're

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not children! We have defeated the Germans on the field of battle. Why can't we solve a simple cipher?"

"What did you pay for it?" Fay shot the question out of the shadow and watched its effect on Sir Richard's features.

"Pay for it? What do you mean, Fay?"

"What did you pay that man in Switzerland?"

"Ten thousand pounds."

"And the fellow in Holland?"

"He died too soon to receive his share. The money went to the general funds."

Fay crossed his legs and glanced at the slender shape of the boots he wore. "I think you have been gulled," he said with the ghost of a smile. "I think that cipher in the boxes is a bum steer, if you know what that means. You tossed away ten thousand pounds — like that!" Fay threw out his hand expressively.

Sir Richard blinked both eyes. The frown died from his face, wrinkle by wrinkle. He leaned back in his chair, thrust his knees against the edge of the table and said, half to Fay, half to MacKeenon:

"Mac thought the same thing! You're both wrong. The thing was tested before the money was paid. The agent who completed the transaction in Switzerland made no mistake. He went to extreme length in the matter."

"How?" asked Fay.

"He named a dye — a fast blue — which the German chemist said was one of the thirty-six which were fully worked out in the formulae. The chemist took the boxes, went into a room, and came out with the

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formula of the fast-blue, down to the last reaction. It couldn't be done by any trick of memory!"

"That sounds plausible," Fay said. "Then it is no hoax?"

"It's straight goods, Fay! The five thousand sheets in these three boxes contain the chemical formulae for the thirty-six dyes. The devil of it is, we lost the key, in — the country north and east of here. You're going to get that key for us!"

"Just a moment. Isn't it possible that the whole thing is a blind?"

"Be clear!"

"I mean that the lines of letters, thirty-two or three on each page, are there for a gull?"

"Go on!"

"They might be a gull for fools to go mad about. The real cipher may be within the lines. That also is a common practice at Dartmoor. Men have received letters from the outside which are written with lemon juice between the lines. All they did was to heat the paper and the message came out in brown ink."

Sir Richard smiled broadly. "That has been thought of," he said, glancing at MacKeenon. "To be frank, as I said, everything has been tried. We've even split some of the paper. We've tried every reaction known to science. We've bathed the sheets in oxalic acid and iodine. There was only one clue in this direction."

Fay lifted his hand and fingered the pearl-pin in his cravat.

"That one clue," continued Sir Richard, "was the

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report of an American chemist that he detected a salt in the composition of the paper. It was so faint, however, that nothing came of it. We're squarely up against the last card — that big gopher in the embassy!"

Fay frowned slightly at the chief's use of an American yegg's pet name for a strong-box. It showed Sir Richard's versatility, and also showed the cracksman what manner of man he was dealing with.

"Gopher has gone out," said Fay in correction. "Only the low-brows of the Middle Western States use it. You should say: 'can or jug or keister.'"

"We'll compromise on 'crib,' a good old word used in the time of Jack Cade and other mid-Victorian gentlemen!"

"All right, Chief! You want me to take it — without trace. In it I'm to find the key to the cipher — if there is a key. What can you say concerning the key? Is it a book, paper or design of some kind?"

"Now we're getting close!" Sir Richard exclaimed. "It is a small packet in the back of the embassy's crib. It was seen only last week by a trusted agent who could go no further. This agent informs me that the neutral nation, north and east of here, is in a quandary concerning it. Germany has requested that the packet be returned over her border."

"Any marks of identification?"

"Yes! You will always know it by a name written in ink across one corner, under a blue string. The name is Otto Mononsonburg — the man who was stabbed in the back, near the Schwartz Canal."

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"Ah," said Fay, "the matter seems easy. I get my freedom?"

"If you get the packet and turn it over to me."

"I'll get it! Now a number of other things, Sir Richard —" Fay turned and stared at the lurking figure of the Scotch inspector. MacKeenon lifted his hand and stroked his jaw with a sly motion. His eyes swung from Fay's to Sir Richard's. They held the glint of the manhunter and the hound. A tawny fire was in them.

For the second time that evening there came an air of tenseness into the room. Fay felt it as he watched the Scotch inspector. Try, as he should, he could never get over the feeling that the detective was his born enemy.

MacKeenon was so like a waiting collie. The leathern pouches of the Scot — the curl to his lips — the fang-like teeth, all made this thing seem real.

With Sir Richard Colstrom there was this difference. The chief had traveled far. He had taken the pains to acquire some of the argot of the underworld. He was rated square — after he caught his quarry. Fay could never believe that a manhunter played a fair game in running down criminals. There was too much oral evidence to the contrary. There had been a number of stool-pigeons in his life. To him, the despicable thing about the game was the traitors.

Born a gentleman's son and riding swiftly through a moderate fortune, Fay had taken the easier way. He had paid! There were other convictions beside the Hatton Gardens affair recorded at Scotland Yard.

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Freedom was a precious thing. He gripped his lips with his teeth and counted ten before he said to Sir Richard:

"One of the conditions of this matter is that I have no hell-hounds of the law trailing me!"

Sir Richard glanced at MacKeenon. The two men understood each other down to the fraction of a glance.

"That's all right," said Sir Richard soothingly. "You can go scot-free. All we want is the key to the cipher. Then, afterwards, you can wear that perfectly good suit to the States instead of donning the broad arrow at Dartmoor."

"Fine!" said Fay without warmth. "Now another matter—"

"What is it?"

"Money!"

"You can have it."

"I'll need a hundred pounds, now!"

Sir Richard drew from his inner vest-pocket a thin bill-fold, which he opened upon the table. From this he extracted ten ten-pound notes and tossed them to Fay.

"Count them," he said as he replaced the bill-fold and made an entry in the little book which he had already consulted when giving the data concerning the strong-box in the embassy.

"One hundred, correct!" said the cracksman, crinkling the sheath of white papers. "Clean notes! I shall have to lose a shilling on the pound with these."

"That's the rate the fences get, eh?"

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Fay smiled as he thrust the bills in his tweed trousers. "How should I know?" he inquired with good-nature.

Sir Richard stared at MacKeenon. Both detectives mirrored Fay's engaging manner. The tensity of the air had vanished.

"You'll get another hundred pounds when you start," Sir Richard said, tapping the table. "When will you start?"

"There's another matter, Chief."

"And that is—?"

"Passports and clearance papers or whatever you call them. I understand there is still some difficulty on account of customs. I might as well travel to Holland, first-class. That means a damn fine alibi of the superior order. Have you any suggestions?"

Sir Richard fingered the lapel of his coat. He turned this down after thought. Fay leaned forward. He saw a little silver greyhound pinned there. It was a passport in a million!

"Do you know what this represents?" asked Sir Richard.

Fay nodded his head and stared at the insignia. "It's the badge of the King's Couriers."

"Correct!"

"Do I get one?"

"I can tell you where there is one which can be—stolen."

"Where?"

Sir Richard allowed his lapel to flap back.

He rested his elbows on the edge of the table and

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fastened upon Fay's eager face the cold scrutiny of a master advising a novice.

"The King's Couriers," he said impressively, "is an ancient and honorable order. The members of the office are chosen for fidelity and speed — hence the greyhound. They can go anywhere by showing the insignia. They need no passports or papers. Show this to a custom officer and he will pass your luggage. Show this little badge to a Mandarin in China or a Zelot in Afghanistan and it is all the same. You get through!"

"Where can I get one?"

Sir Richard beamed at Fay's enthusiasm. "There's a courier living in Richmond Hill who has what you want," said the chief. "This courier has been to — the country north and east of here. From this courier you not only will obtain the little silver greyhound, but also a detailed description of the embassy where the key to the cipher is. I would suggest that you turn the courier's place of residence off tomorrow night. We'll give out that you escaped from Dartmoor and entered London in some surprising manner. What would be more natural than you robbing a house for clothes and papers? That will let us out in case of complications with the neutral nation."

"You mean if I get caught?"

"Stranger things than that have happened. Now, Fay —"

Sir Richard pulled down the lapels of his coat and rose to his feet. He pressed back the chair with his legs. He cleared his throat.

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"Now, Fay," he continued impressively, "you have everything. The address in Richmond Hill is Number 4, Rose Crescent. Go there tomorrow about midnight and prowl the house. Get the little silver greyhound and talk things over with the courier — who failed to do what you are going to do."

Fay moved toward the door after picking up his cap. MacKeenon glided to his side. The cracksman stood erect. He turned slowly and stared at Sir Richard, who was studying the cipher boxes.

"Au revoir," said Fay.

The chief swung his head and rested his chin on his chest.

"Same to you," he said. "You're hep! Now blow! Mum's the office, pal! The ducat and more kale will be ready for you at London Bridge Station when you're ready to go. Inspector MacKeenon, the niftiest gumshoe runner out of the Yard, will fetch them at your order. Eh, Mac?"

"Weil, I don' know! I daurna disagree wi' twa o' you!"

Sir Richard came back to respectability as he lifted his chin and advanced his hand toward Fay.

"Drop around Cockspur Street and the Strand," he said. "Get the old, old moss out of your head, Fay. Talk to the splendid men of your own country who made victory possible. The town is full of Pershing's boys! And Fay —"

The cracksman's hand was on the door.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Don't overlook the trifles. They beat you before!"

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"I'll watch out for them!"

"And, Fay —"

"Y—es!"

"Don't look for Saidee Isaacs. Go right to Number 4, Rose Crescent and turn the house off. You know how to do that!"

Fay was half through the doorway. Sir Richard made a signal for MacKeenon to draw back. The inspector's face clouded as he caught the order. He peered around the edge of the chamfering. His eyes snapped like a wiry terrier's as he heard the swift patter of footsteps on the pavement.

"He's goon, mon!" he said. "Fay's goon!"

"Good!" said Sir Richard.

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CHAPTER IV

"SAIDEE ISAACS"

CHESTER FAY felt the grip of a London night as he dodged in and out of the neatly boxed trees that lined the street upon which was the quiet house of the Two Lions.

He did not glance back. He knew that only amateurs did things like that. The five years in Dartmoor had taught him that liberty was a priceless thing. There were guards and constables on that dark street. Some turned and watched his fleeting form with suspicion. Any moment one might call a halt. Every second, he expected to hear a shout from MacKeenon.

The high tower of Westminster loomed over the housetops. Beyond this tower was the House of Parliament. At its base ran the sullen flood of the Thames. Over the river a bridge arched, strangely pale in the night light.

Gripping his palms, and somewhat surprised to find the overcoat over his arm, he turned at the Embankment and there swept the street with the corner of his eye. No man followed him. A single constable, half curious, had stepped out on the asphalt. He stood like a post, his hands on his bent knees.

"Adieu, sir," Fay laughed lightly. "Adieu, you there, and you Keenon and you, Richard. You both

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would have let me rot in that hell on earth if you hadn't needed me. From now on, I'm a free agent! And the world is wide."

Breathing the night air, Fay hurried toward the east. His shoulders were squared and his heels and toes clicked over the hard stone without visible effort.

He walked in the same swinging gait until he reached the place where the black shadow of Cleo's Needle lifted against the leaden vault of the London sky.

Here he turned and leaned over the Embankment's rail. The tide flowed slowly toward the city and the sea. Bridges arched from shore to shore. Great caravansaries loomed with their staring windows arranged in shelf-like tiers. Beyond them sounded the roar of midnight traffic.

A sudden loneliness came over him. He was without home or friends. The years at Dartmoor had effaced many memories. They left one which was overpowering. How little was human effort. There had been a time when flash thieves with international reputations had pointed him out at the St. James and Alhambra Lounge, as the king of cracksmen. The time was gone. The old crew had either been caught or had died overseas on the red fields of Flanders. Few served or continued their profession.

Saidee Isaacs loomed before him. He searched the Thames and found her face there. He closed his eyes and marked her flashing presence. He saw her dark hair, her lashes, her olive cheeks and Madonna smile. That same smile could change between the time of seconds to hate and rage. Dutch Gus, who should

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have known, had called her the Mona Lisa of the underworld.

Fay wondered where she was living, as he tore his glance away from the river and turned with his back to the wall. He had last seen her on that eventful day when a cage had shot up in the court of Assizes, a judge had pronounced the sentence, and the cage, with him in it, had dropped down to the waiting van which had started for the prison with both horses on a gallop.

Her mouth had formed one word: "Courage!"

He recalled all this as he struck the wall with his right heel. There was little enough honor in the best of thieves. The stool-pigeons had made squealing a profitable vocation. Men who traveled with golf-bags filled with highly tempered tools of the safe-breaking profession, and who sported small black motor cars of marvelous speed, were proper marks. The pigeons or carelessness or something had dragged him down. Fay often wondered, in those Dartmoor years, if Saidee Isaacs had a hand in his conviction.

MacKeenon would not give him Saidee's address. Sir Richard had told him to forget her. He decided, with a sudden start as Big Ben struck the quarters, that the day that had been ushered in would be devoted to finding Saidee Isaacs. She had some things to answer for — chief of which was her reason for not writing to Dartmoor.

He straightened, hung the coat over his arm, fished out a cigarette from the case, and struck a match upon the damp stone and hurried away from the river.

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Suddenly, and specter-like, a form blocked his way. It was an American soldier clad in a well-fitting olive-drab uniform, upon the sleeves of which was a wound-stripe.

"Say, mister," Fay heard. "Say, will you show me the way to my hotel? It's the Huntington, I guess. You guys in this burg call it different. You call it the 'Untin'don, or something like that. D'ye know where it is, Chappie?"

"Surest thing you know, old pal," said Fay, shifting the coat and linking his arm under the soldier's. "Come along with me — I'm going right that way!"

It was at the square, where the red mass of the Huntington Temperance Hotel juts out into the Strand, that the soldier disengaged Fay's arm and stared at him.

"Say," he said, "are you a bloody Britisher?"

"Surest thing you know."

"You don't look like one."

"Looks are skin deep, my friend."

The soldier accepted a proffered cigarette from Fay's gold case, glanced at the tip, then declared as he reached for a match:

"They may be skin deep, Chappie, but you remind me of the States — New York! If you're a Yank, why didn't you get in the fight?"

Fay had no ready answer for the thrust which most certainly went home. He covered his confusion by accepting the half-burnt match, then he laughed lightly.

"Why didn't I go to the fight?" he temporized.

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"I've got a good reason — a very good one. I was never invited."

"Ah, go on!"

"Besides," said Fay, "I guess the fight is over."

The soldier glanced at the black band on his arm. "You're an American?" he insisted.

"Well, suppose I am?"

"And you came over here without a uniform?"

"I've worn a uniform for five years," said Fay truthfully.

"What service?"

"The King's own!"

"Gawan!"

"Surest thing you know. And now, my friend," he added, stepping back, "I'm going to leave you at the Huntington — not 'Untin'don! Some day, when you go back to the States and to Broadway, just drop into the Café Ponsardine and tell the chap at the desk, in front, that you saw Chester Fay. Tell him — you'll know him by a bald spot, and a scar on his chin — that I'm working for Scotland Yard. He may drop over when you tell him that. He may buy you a drink!"

"Ah, say!"

Fay was gone with a finishing laugh. He turned into the Strand and hurried eastward. He knew of a place where often he had spent the night when the Yard was close on his heels in days gone by. This lodging for a night was run by an ex-fence who bought only diamonds out of their settings or large Bank of England notes. Clanson was his name.

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Fay turned a corner, leaned against the wall and lighted a cigarette in the shadow of a doorway, within which was a deep, blue light. A constable stood across the street in an attitude of resignation. There was no other name for it.

The cracksman shifted his coat from his right arm to his left, dropped the cigarette to his feet and stepped briskly toward the same corner he had rounded. It was an old trick of a man who feared a shadow. He saw none. A "growler" or four wheeler, drawn by a decrepit nag, rattled over the asphalt, going toward the West End.

Assured, Fay turned and hurried up the side street until he reached a small temperance hotel, at the side of which was a shop bearing the ancient and honorable title of: "M. Clanson, Dealer in Antiques and Foreign Monies."

Fay found a handle which he pulled twice, then twice more after a five-second wait. He repeated the signal, known of old. A light showed at the back of the shop. It came toward the front. Clanson, in night cap and with a candle held over his head, pressed his bloated face to the dusty pane of the door. His nose grew white on the tip, as he stared at Fay. He drew back with a smirk and started removing two chains and rattling at least one key. The door opened on a third chain.

"A passenger from the west," said Fay, using an old countersign.

Clanson growled and closed the door. The last chain was guided from its channel. The door opened

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wide. Fay stepped in briskly. He did not look back of him.

"From the west," he said as Clanson locked the door. "I've a scratch or two I want changed."

"Let's see," said the ex-fence, staring at Fay and then at the drippings from the candle. "It's been six, no five years, since you were in here. Much water has flowed through the Thames since then."

"And some blood," said Fay, laying his coat on the top of a dusty show-case within which was a collection of Japanese and Javanese daggers with wicked-looking points and yellow ivory handles. "Some blood," he added, turning and reaching in his pocket.

Clanson nodded his gray head. He stared at the front of the shop, then at Fay's hand, which came out with the ten-pound notes Sir Richard had given to him.

"Two and six off the pound," he said craftily.

"Then," said Fay, peeling off one half the notes, "I'll keep a few! Funny, too, these happen to be good."

Clanson blinked and counted the sheath. "Five," he said, dryly. "That's makes six pun and five bobs — off. How'll you have it, Edward? Let's see, wasn't it Edward? You had so many."

Fay watched Clanson and the candle vanish into the gloom of the shop. Minutes passed wherein he could have obtained a collection of daggers and jade paper-knives. Clanson was opening his strong-box. The old rogue, who once said, "If there were no receivers there would be no thieves," evidently thought the Bank of England notes were stolen property. Fay had no other way in all London to change them. Be-

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sides, it would be possible for the Yard to trail him by the numbers on the notes.

Clanson came back, deposited the candle on the showcase near Fay's tweed coat, and started counting out newly minted sovereigns with fingers that were loth to see them go.

He finished the count with two one-pound Bank of Ireland notes and a stack of bright shillings.

"There's forty-three, fifteen," he said. "All nice new money. Times was when you brought me more than that, Edward."

Fay pocketed the coins and bills without counting them. He thrust his right hand under his coat, wheeled and stepped briskly to the door.

"So long!" he drawled as Clanson peered out, then turned the key. "Oh," he added as a subtle afterthought, "what have you heard of Saidee Isaacs?"

The ex-fence coughed before he answered: "Little, lad! A gentleman was in from the west the other day — a fortnight ago, who asked the same question. Stout gentleman who used to come with you, Edward. Dutch — Dutch —"

"Dutch Gus!" snarled Fay, with his eyes flashing. "That rat?"

"He asked about little Saidee Isaacs. I told him the same as I tell you. I know nothing. A lady like her — with her motor car and her slavy or two, don't happen this way often."

"Motor car?" asked Fay blankly.

"The same, lad. Twice I saw it. Once in Cockspur Street, once in Piccadilly, at Berkeley Street."

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Fay fastened upon the old man a glance which flamed white fire. "Open the door!" he said, swinging his coat. "Let me out! Me rotting in that hell-on-earth and she in a —"

Clanson stared after the form of Fay as he darted over the street and swung westward. Then the ex-fence closed and chained the door.

There is a cab-stand where Regent Street leaves Piccadilly. To this stand Fay hurried, sprang into a two-wheeler, and said very distinctly to an ancient driver:

"Park Lane!"

"'Ow?" asked the driver.

"To Park Lane, very quickly."

"Certainly, sir," mumbled the driver, climbing up the back and tilting the shafts to a dangerous angle. "Gee-up!" he added, cracking the whip.

Fay stopped the cab at the corner of Hyde Park where Oxford Street is joined by Park Lane. He sprang out, tossed the leaning driver two bright shillings and started south toward the looming shadows of many mansions.

Reaching Hyde Park Corner he struck westward in a long swinging glide. The hour was after two. The night was a black pocket, blurred here and there with blue jewels from the arcs.

He had planned to take a night's rest at the hotel which flanked Clanson's Antique Shop. The dealer's statement concerning Dutch Gus, and, moreover, Saidee Isaacs, changed this plan. He wanted to walk in the wide places. No trace of drowsiness weighed

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his eye-lids. Shepherd Bush — the Thames — Richmond and Hammersmith, were ahead of him. There was no law in England that prevented a man taking the road. Fay went on, with his oakum-stained nails gripping his palms, his eyes set ahead and slightly upward where the yellow vault of the London sky pressed down on his throbbing temples.

He came, but not by design, to hedge-ensconced villas and the many winding lanes of Richmond Hill!

"Number 4, Rose Crescent," flashed through his brain. This was the address given to him by Sir Richard Colstrom.

He glanced under the long shelf of boughs which stretched toward the south and the river. The sight was a pleasing one, despite the night's dew. Smart driveways, box-hedges, clumps of well trimmed trees and the ghostly outlines of Queen Anne cottages and villas showed that he was in one of the better parts of London.

He glided along the grass, momentarily expecting to be accosted by a constable. The hour was almost three. The chimes of Big Ben were somewhat distant. The roar of the city was far away. The smug dwellers of Richmond Hill were wrapped in slumber.

Rose Crescent proved to be a circular drive, bordered by plane trees whose trunks were encased in iron-grilled railings. Neat curb-steps bore the names of the owners. A lodge-house was passed with the gates closed and barred.

The numbers on the curb-stones or on top of the steps started running down as Fay hurried toward a cross

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road and the barrier of a high hedge which enclosed some vast estate.

He stopped as he reached Number 6. The next villa would be the address mentioned by Sir Richard. Fay stepped to the curb and glanced up and down from under the shelter of an overhanging bough. No one was in sight!

Turning swiftly, he darted through the shrubbery of Number 6 and tiptoed along the driveway. The gravel crunched slightly as he worked toward the back of a stately villa. He stepped to the grass, listened a moment, then dropped to his hands and knees and crawled through an opening in a hedge. He rose, strained his eyes, and stared up at the wall before him.

A mansard roof, gables on the corners, well-curtained bays and wide porches, denotedone of the smartest of London houses. A small garage at the end of the driveway had room for two motor cars. A side house, well hidden in shrubbery, probably contained the servants. The all, in the night's gloom, was a picture to charm most any prowler.

Fay studied the lower windows, with a professional glance. He drew himself back into the hedge as he heard a click and then the sound of somebody moving at the front of the villa.

Steeled and alert, he waited with every nerve tingling. The first sound was followed by the slight grating of feet upon a porch. A blurred and well muffled head was thrust around the edge of a white post. Sharp eyes searched the shrubbery and the hedge. Fay remained motionless. He held his breath.

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Then and shrillingly, there came a signal from the other side of the villa. The head on the porch was jerked back. A burly form leaped to the grass where the driveway turned about the house. This form rebounded, stood erect, then came lumbering toward Fay and the back of the villa.

The shrill cry of warning was repeated. Fay drew himself into the smallest possible shadow. A man lunged past him. This man's face was revealed for a moment like a flash seen on a picture screen. It was unmistakable. It was memory haunting.

"Dutch Gus," breathed Fay, hardly daring to move. "That's Dutch Gus." He heard the crash of glass as the prowler stepped through a low greenhouse. A fence broke under a man's weight in the back of the garage. Afterwards came profound silence, until a far-off dog barked and signaled the man's passing.

Fay waited. It was barely possible that things would quiet down. He had heard no sound from the villa.

The mystery of the affair gripped him in a passive vise. Dutch Gus was the last man he had expected to see in that part of London. MacKeenon or even Sir Richard might have visited the villa. A King's courier lived in the house, from all information. Then, asked Fay to himself, what was the connection between Dutch Gus, the lookout, Sir Richard and the owner of the villa? The entire matter was bound up in some manner with his quest after the cipher's key.

Fay had lived alone too long to believe that the

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presence of the crook in that neighborhood could be laid to chance. He had often studied the law of chances. They were infinite in the matter of meeting a friend or enemy in a strange locality. The police never caught their quarry through the chance meeting. It was always by a lead or a given direction.

He turned the problem over in his quick way as he waited for some development from the villa. He had no fear for himself. The night was too dark for pursuit. There were innumerable side lanes and turns and twists to that part of London. The constables were either asleep or dozing in sheltered nooks.

Glancing upward, after emerging from the hedge, Fay studied the windows on the side of the villa. No light shone from any of them. A light would have been an indication that Dutch Gus and his lumbering get-away had aroused the occupants.

The absence of any light was disconcerting, however. It would be equally easy for someone inside to keep watch without revealing his presence. In fancy he saw a lower curtain move. He dismissed this notion as time passed. He waited, realizing that nothing would be gained by a retreat. He was on the grounds of the villa he had been told to prowl. His coming there had frightened Dutch Gus into a bungling get-a-way, which was some satisfaction after all.

The warp and woof of the cipher affair would very likely prove a tangle of many lives. Fay had not yet decided that he would go to that country north and east of London and open the strong-box in the embassy. He had not felt a call for patriotism in the enterprise.

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Rather, the matter would have to shape itself. He distrusted the police and Scotland Yard from bitter experience. And now, despite his efforts to the contrary, fate or chance had brought him to the very house that Sir Richard had wanted him to prowl.

He dropped to one knee, finally. Swiftly rolling the coat into a small bundle he pressed it under a bush. Rising and listening with his senses alert, he poised upon his toes, then started toward the nearest window, which was the rear one of a huge bay.

Reaching this, after avoiding the gravel walk by stepping over it, he crouched beneath the sill and pressed his ear to the frame-work of the wall. His hearing was cell-matured and acute. The presence of anybody above him, or any movement in the house, would be instantly detected. He heard no one.

Working swiftly, he tried the window. It was locked, as he expected. Reaching upward, after pulling on a pair of gloves which had been in the pocket of the coat, he climbed by means of a vine and a ledge to the sill, where he cupped his hands and studied the lock.

It was the ordinary kind he knew so well. There was a thin-bladed knife on the end of his watch-chain. He drew this out and ran its blade between the sashes. He struck the upper sash with the palm of his hand. He pressed the lower sash and found the catch moving on stiff pivots. One more try and the lock was in the off position. He waited then, ready to spring to the ground or raise the window.

No sound came from the house. Fay bent his back, reached down with his left fingers and slowly raised

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the window. The opening he made was not over a foot in height.

Stooping and grasping the sill, he thrust his feet through, turned his body and squirmed inside. He straightened swiftly and waited. Nothing happened.

Soft curtains barred his way to the room. He reached out and pressed these aside with cool fingers. The scent of a Japanese perfume greeted his keen nostrils. Within this scent was another — the faint odor of heliotrope.

Frowning slightly, he wondered at this. It brought memories with its fragrant essence. Years before, somewhere, he had known that peculiar sweetness. It lifted him, and brought to his mind what he had missed in life's great game.

Stepping forward, he moved amid the furniture of the room, caught his directions by instinct, which is given to animals and prowlers, and passed through a double door whose panels, down to the rugs, were tiny crystals of glass.

He reached the opposite side of the villa from which he had entered. He opened a catch and raised a window so that a hand-hold was between the sash and sill. Satisfied that he had two avenues of escape, he went back through the door of cut-glass and stood in the center of the first room.

Gradually, his eyes brought out the splendid details of the furnishings. Soft pillows mounded box-couches and cozy nooks. Tapestries and portières hung along the walls. A dark-wood stand was at his right hand. Upon this was a cloisonné tea set and a lacquer tray.

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The gold arabesques of the tray came through the gloom. A dragon stared at him.

"Nice place," he thought. "One of these hundred pounds a year affairs."

He felt then, rather than heard, the movement of a curtain at the front of the room. A slight chill swept through the air. It was as if someone had swished by.

Fay, alert and crouching, blinked his eyes in the direction of the danger. He lowered his hands and half turned toward the window by which he had entered the room. It was too late. A switch snapped upon the wall. A blinding glare sprang from a score of frosted bulbs. The cluster overhead seemed to explode with light. The room and all its details were revealed within the time of two seconds.

A woman stood between the portières which separated the front parlor from the room with the bay. A pair of very determined eyes flashed over the blue-steel of a medium-calibre revolver of superior make. Above the eyes was a pink night cap. Beneath the extended arm, which was as steady as a marksman's, Fay saw the soft sheen of a pair of pajamas which were partly hidden by a belted bath-robe.

He neither backed away nor changed color. He never had feared a gun. He stood, half turned away from the menace of the revolver. His eyes accustomed themselves to the blinding light. His hand raised and bunched his plaid cap from his silver-gray hair. He bowed as the woman lowered the revolver and let it dangle at her side.

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"Chester Fay!" she exclaimed.

The cracksman's manner might have been Chesterfield's as he swept the floor with his cap.

The little lady with the business-like revolver was Saidee Isaacs!

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CHAPTER V

"AT DAYBREAK"

CHESTER FAY had the saving grace of lightning analysis. He had received the surprise of his life without showing it. The sweep of his plaid cap, as he bowed to Saidee Isaacs and straightened himself with lithe swiftness, had allowed him time to piece together a number of things.

He stared at her with a quizzical smile that illumined his keen features and disarmed suspicion. Sir Richard, old in the ways of the world, had managed the meeting. The presence of Dutch Gus was as yet to be explained. The events of the night, however, were closely woven together. Fay did not believe that chance or coincidence played the slightest part in the matter.

The long arm of luck had not caused him to enter the one house in all of London where Saidee Isaacs dwelt. Nor did the long arm of coincidence bring Dutch Gus to that part of Richmond Hill. The Yard, the girl, the cipher and the presence of the German crook were all one web, woven in a pattern.

"Well?" said Saidee Isaacs. "Well, Chester, when did you get out?"

Fay fingered his cap and stared directly into the girl's brown eyes. They were soft but he had seen them flash livid fire on more than one occasion.

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"When did I get out?" he repeated. "When did I? You ought to know!"

Saidee Isaacs tapped the thick rug with her silver-buckled slipper. She glanced down her dark lashes and uncocked the revolver with a practiced motion.

"Why should I know?" she asked, glancing up.

"I think you had a hand in it!"

"You do?"

"Yes."

Saidee Isaacs swished her hair back from her forehead as she removed the lacy night cap and tossed it upon a divan. "Come sit down," she said, "and tell me about it. Tell me, Chester, why you think I had anything to do with getting you sprung."

"'Sprung' is good," said Fay, tossing his cap after the dainty one.

"But," he added, "I don't like to think that you let me rot in that place for five years — without writing a line."

"I had a reason!"

"Well, it'll have to be a good one. We quit, Saidee, if it isn't! What does all this mean?" Fay swept his hands about the room. He stepped swiftly toward the portières and parted them. He darted a quick glance around a well-cushioned and thick-rugged parlor. "Who's upstairs?" he asked, turning and coming back to her.

"Jealous?" She was sitting on the divan as she asked this question.

He flamed, with the red blood mounting his white cheeks and burning his temples.

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"Who's upstairs?" he asked in deadly earnestness.

"Nobody!"

"Nobody at all?"

"I'm all alone."

"The servants?" Fay glanced toward the rear of the room where a half-door to a butler's pantry showed.

"They are having a night off. Besides," she added swiftly, "I was expecting you. I didn't think you'd bungle things as you did. I heard you on the porch. You stepped on the electric rug, Chester. It didn't remind me of old times, at all."

Fay's brain worked swiftly. It was evident that Saidee did not know that Dutch Gus had attempted to pay her a visit. He closed his lips, sat down on the divan at a discreet distance, and studied her from the corner of his left eye. She had not aged since last he had known her. The rings on her fingers were more splendid than he had ever seen her wear. The shadow of a frown crossed his features as he noted a necklace about her throat.

She tapped the rug, with a cold smile bringing down the corners of her mouth. She turned then and stared at him. His eyes stared back at her. Neither moved. Fay tried to read what was transpiring in her mind. He caught the scent of heliotrope from her negligee. It softened him with old memory. He leaned closer, hardly daring to breathe.

"Chester," she said finally, "you're the biggest fool I ever knew. You're always making mistakes. That finger-print! That slip in Paris, ten years ago. And now, you stepping on a rug and blundering about.

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Why didn't you come straight to me — not like a thief in the night?"

"I came the way I was sent!"

She arched her brows. "The Yard don't send their agents that way," she said.

"So!" said Fay, "you know! You got me out so I'd be a stool-pigeon for Sir Richard. That's it — is it?"

"A stool, Chester? Think what you're saying. Think of the old, old days when we were going dead wrong. Why, this is a different thing!"

"What do you mean, Saidee?"

She smiled inscrutably, which was her ancient charm to him. Her eyes glowed as she reached out an overly jeweled hand. "All bets in the crook game are off," she said with American directness. "They're off for a time, Chester. I got you out of Dartmoor for bigger game."

Fay had never fully understood Saidee Isaacs. The riddle-woman was strong in her. She was two natures as wide apart as the poles. She could hate stronger and longer than anybody he had ever known. Her love, which had never been given to any man, would mean all in all.

"You," he said bitterly, "were long in getting to this big game. It's been five years, plus one day, since you told me to have courage, in that court room. That was just after the beak pronounced the limit."

"Kindly refrain from slang, Chester."

"Oh, you!" he snapped, with his eyes flashing. "You — you lady! Since when? I suppose you've

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forgotten the Maiden Lane affair or the pint of uncut stones we switched on the sucker who came up from the Cape. I—"

Saidee Isaacs had risen and stood facing him. "Another word," she said, "and it's all off between us! I had you sprung, to use your old slang. I used my influence with Sir Richard. I told him that you were the only living man who could open that box in Holland, without leaving a trace. He mentioned other box-men — Sheeney Mike and Foley the Goat and little Eddie Richards. They're all doing bits in England. You were my choice, and he sent for you!"

"How about the Hatton Gardens affair influencing him?"

"It did, in a way," admitted the girl as she narrowed her eyes. "But the main thing was that he had sent — somebody who failed. That somebody came back and recommended you. It's a hard safe to crack. It's well watched. Besides, Sir Richard wanted it done without trace."

Fay felt more at ease as he motioned toward the divan with his left hand. "You seem to know a lot about this, Saidee. Were you the King's Courier? Do I get a little silver greyhound from you?"

She hesitated and then sat down. Her hands folded in her lap. The jewels glittered and flashed the white fire from the electric globes. Her eyes widened. An elusive smile lurked in their corners as she turned to him.

"Of course not!" she said archly. "Do you think I could open a big safe like you can? You foolish boy!"

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"I've phoned Sir Richard my house might be burglarized and report that the thief stole a silver greyhound and some clothes. That's only an alibi for Scotland Yard in case of international complications. You know they might happen."

Fay moistened his lips and leaned back against the cushions. Saidee had offered a naïve explanation which hardly rang true. She had not explained how clothes and a King's messenger happened to be in a rather smart Richmond Hill villa.

"Oh, you're too deep for me," he said frankly. "I'll take your word, Saidee. I always have. Come across with the badge and the diagram of the embassy. Sir Richard said I would get them here at Number 4."

"What time is it?"

"Almost daybreak," he said, glancing from the dial of his watch to the windows. "I haven't had a bit of sleep since the screw woke me up this — yesterday morning, and told me to get my clothes on. Think how I felt!"

"The screw?"

"Yes! The damn blear-eyed, sneaking cockney who counted me so often I thought he'd wear my buttons off. Five counts a day in Dartmoor, Saidee."

"Do you think it pays?"

"You're no one to ask me that!" Fay shot the statement through clean, white teeth, then studied its effect on the girl at his side.

She tapped the point of her slipper upon the rug, rose, glanced toward the half-door to the butler's pantry, and said:

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"I've squared it, Chester. Come, and I'll make some tea and a little lunch. I want to show you how quickly one can climb up when they quit fighting, fighting the police of the world."

Fay walked by the girl's side, then fell one step behind her as she led the way through a curtain and down a passage to a kitchen which was illuminated by a single wall cluster.

He stood erect on the well-scoured tiling and glanced about with amazement. There was everything in the culinary art within the four white walls. A wine-box showed with its drip pan. A row of many shaped glasses, arranged in half-dozens, stretched along two shelves. A cocktail-shaker hung on a hook. A recess above the glasses was filled with dark bottles whose seals spoke of price and age.

Bins, drawers, an electric-stove, half-barrels, china with a tiny gold crest, knives and silverware, were at the further end of the kitchen. A door was set in the wall, through which the servants passed. Fay eyed this door as he asked:

"Who paid for all this?"

"Jealous?" asked the girl, as she placed a pot on the stove and snapped on a switch.

"Who paid for it?" he repeated hotly.

Saidee Isaacs wheeled and came toward him. Her eyes were no longer the inscrutable pools of dark brown. They flashed and drove him back toward the wall.

"Who paid for it? I did!" she exclaimed. "How do you think I got it? By wiles or guiles or knavery?

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By lowering myself to a moll-buzzer or a store hister? No, and you know it! I earned it, Chester Fay!"

"In five years?"

"Yes — in less! In four years! I want you to take back what you said."

"I didn't say anything, Saidee. I didn't —"

"Well, you were going to!"

Fay smiled and only increased her anger. "You thought something," she said staunchly. "You have no right to ask me who paid for this house or the things in it."

"I take it back," said Fay, glancing toward the electric-stove. "The water's boiling, Saidee," he added. "Let's start all over again. I'm beginning to like this little kitchen."

Saidee Isaacs shaded her eyes with her lashes and switched off the current. A Japanese pot came out of a closet. Two cups followed it. Tea was made as Fay watched her moving swiftly over a sideboard upon which she sliced tongue, bread and a heaping mound of old English fruit cake.

"Bring up a chair!" she commanded. "Bring two!"

He moved the chairs over the tiling and offered her one. She drew it to her side, turned and stared at his hair. "I noticed that first," she said, softening her voice slightly. "It was brown when you went in."

"It was! It would have been white instead of gray if you hadn't seen Sir Richard. Ten years of that hell! Look at my nails."

"I noticed them," she said, meeting his eyes. "Do you think there is anything in crime?"

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"Not lately," Fay blurted as he seated himself. "Pass the tea, please."

She poured the cup full and poised the Japanese pot. "You're going to square it now?" she asked.

"I may!"

"I want you to promise. I want you to go to Holland and open that strong-box. I don't want you to fail me. Remember it's me! Sir Richard and the rest don't count. You're doing it for me, because I recommended —"

"Ah," said Fay, "then it was you?"

Saidee Isaacs bit her lower lip. "I had a hand in it," she said. "But you mustn't think I went to Holland or anything like that. The party who went there — failed. I don't fail as a rule!"

Fay glanced keenly at her. She returned the stare bravely. Her breast lifted and fell as she breathed with emotion. "I did what I could for the Yard," she added quickly. "I have the diagram of the embassy. I have the little silver greyhound, which is to be your passport."

"Is it effective?"

"Tremendously so! Why, everybody just makes way for you when you wear it. It's a magic talisman these days, Chester."

Fay reached for the cake and poised a slice over his tea cup. He studied the pattern on the little silver spoon. It was monogrammed "S. I." The cup was also marked with her initials.

"I like this place," he said with naïveté. "I was worried all the time that you would go clear down and

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out. And here you're living like a princess of the blood. How do you do it?"

Saidee Isaacs pushed back the chair and rose. She glanced down at Fay with an intent expression. Her long, dark lashes gave a silken look to her eyes.

"I'll get the diagram," she offered, moving toward the door which led to the front of the house. "Don't ask so many questions! Take what you get!"

"One fine little girl," he thought as he watched her vanishing form. "But," he added, munching on the cake with his chin lowered, "she's dangerous, and I know it. Wonder what she did to earn all this?"

Saidee reappeared, closed the door and laid an envelope upon the sideboard. She sat down after pouring out more tea. She tapped the envelope with her fingers, hastily tore across one end and dumped out a folded piece of white paper and an object done up in thin yellow tissue.

"This is the silver greyhound," she said, "which only King's Couriers are supposed to wear. You prowled this house tonight and opened my wall safe. You could do that blindfolded. I paid five pounds for it, and there's only three hundred possible combinations."

Fay showed professional concern as he took the silver greyhound from the girl's fingers and held it out appraisingly.

He pinned it to the right lapel of his tweed coat and leaned back. "Now the map," he said. "The little diagram the gay-cat got in Holland."

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"I told you to be careful with the slang, Chester. 'Gay-cat' is very bad form. 'Courier' would be better."

"Let me see it!"

Saidee opened the paper and laid it down between the two tea cups. It was a well-done diagram of the main floor of a splendid house. The streets were named. The locality of the safe was shown in red ink. Beneath the diagram was a notation which Fay saw was in Saidee's handwriting — fine and precise.

"Read it," he asked, straining his eyes.

"Oh, it goes on to say that a very wise little safe-cracker will find an American strong-box with two dials and a dial-keister. The day door is secured by a flat lock which probably can be picked. The safe stands on a concrete and tile flooring. There is a space overhead hardly big enough for a man to secrete himself. The sides of the safe are in plain view of two streets."

"Go on," said Fay as Saidee Isaacs glanced up. "That's your handwriting. I still think you went to Holland."

"Be careful! Don't tell all that you think, Chester. You'll spoil our midnight party."

"It's almost a daylight one!"

She glanced at a pantry window. "Gray dawn," she said musingly. "The cold, gray dawn, Chester."

"And time I'm going, I suppose," he said, reaching and taking the diagram. He held it before him and ran his eyes to left and right over the paper. His glance was the keen darting one of a professional.

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"This stairway?" he asked, pointing toward a series of shaded lines. "Where does that lead?"

"Down to a basement."

"What's in it?"

"Rooms, where some of the embassy's staff spend the day. There's no one there at night. The guards are outside. One watchman stays by the safe. He usually sleeps from three to four-thirty. He gets coffee, then, from a woman who brings it to him."

Fay glanced at her without betraying his mood.

"This packet Sir Richard told me about?" he asked. "This cipher's key, done up in paper with string around it and a name across one corner, is where, Saidee?"

"On a top shelf in the keister. You'll have to go through the day-door, the outer door and the keister door before you reach it."

Fay arched his brows and leaned over toward her. "What's upstairs?" he inquired.

"More rooms and offices. Sometimes the embassy's staff work all night in the front chambers. You can usually tell by a light in the front. If there's no light then the staff has completed its work and gone home."

"Very precise, Saidee. You're clearing up things, nicely. Also, you've been there for the Yard. Nothing on this earth could make me believe that you haven't."

"Finish your tea," she said, "and come into the other room."

Fay pocketed the diagram and fingered the little silver greyhound as he rose and followed Saidee Isaacs through the doorway.

She stood near the divan but did not motion for him

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to sit down. Her eyes fastened upon his tweed cap close by her own. She gathered her lips into a sympathetic pucker as she asked:

"Have you any money?"

Fay tapped his trousers pocket. "Plenty," he said lightly. "I've money and more money coming. The clinking quid, Saidee! Remember how we went after it, once?"

"We took the wrong road, Chester." She turned and stared at him. Her eyes opened and studied his silver-gray hair. His keen, white features and rounded chin brought her over the years and then back again.

"You promise me," she asked, "that you will go straight? That you will get a sleep at some respectable hotel and meet whom you are to meet tonight? That you will remember me on your trip to Holland?"

Fay reached and picked up his cap. He remembered that his overcoat was beneath the hedge outside the window. There was one other matter. He moved close to her side and touched the sleeve of her bathrobe.

"Saidee," he inquired in a deadly level voice, "when did you see Dutch Gus?"

He had expected a surprise. Her arm grew rigid. Her head turned and flashed the jewels of the necklace till they dazzled his eyes. The olive purity of her face changed to a flushing rage. She swished around, jerked her arm from him and shot a shimmer of fire from beneath her dark lashes.

"Dutch Gus! That man? He followed me to Holland! Now you know! He queered my mission for the Yard!"

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"Queered it?"

Saidee Isaacs paced the floor of the room. Her eyes shone tawny and fire-laden as she came up to Fay and grasped his shoulder.

"Promise me you will *get* him!"

"Sure! Where is he?"

"In London, somewhere. He's in with a mob of Germans and Austrians who are after the dye cipher. They found out where I was going — why I was going to Holland. They didn't have the nerve to attempt the safe, Chester. They didn't! They waited until I tried — and failed. They stole my luggage coming back. They kidnapped my French maid. They did everything. They may *do* more!" Saidee Isaacs reached swiftly and snatched up the revolver.

"Take this, Chester! You may need it!"

"Go easy," said Fay as he felt the revolver slipping into his pocket. "Go easy, Saidee. You better keep it here. Dutch Gus was trying to prowl the house when I got through the hedge. It was him on the electric door-mat. I didn't —"

"Are you sure?" Her voice lowered and gained in timbre. "Are you sure, Chester?"

"I saw him trying to pick the front-door lock. He heard me coming or got a signal. He dashed for the back of the house and the garage. He went through the greenhouse, by the sound he made. Always clumsy!"

"That was him!" She reached and lifted the revolver. She cocked it and lowered her right hand. "I'll keep it," she said determinedly. "You switch

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out the light and leave now. If he comes, I'll empty all five cartridges into him. I'd do it gladly!"

Fay started toward the switch on the wall. He glanced at the long windows. One was up where he had left a possible escape. The light of a London morning showed through this opening.

He snapped off the switch. The two stood in the center of the room as he stepped back to her side. He felt her presence in deep breathing. A softness came over him. It was five years since he had talked to a woman.

"Saidee," he said. "Dutch Gus won't bother you now. It's daybreak. You know him! He never works in the light!"

"But tonight I may —"

"Tonight I leave for Holland — or elsewhere. What do you say we chuck the job for the Yard and take up the old trail? There's Havre and the other ports where American gold flows. There's Monte Carlo, still doing business. The world is torn wide open. We can clean up a million."

"And get caught!"

"No! I've the greyhound and my old nerve. We can go toward the north and west and double back by way of Stavanger, Norway. We can work the boats. The commercial war is on! What will the cipher do for us? The Yard will thank me if I get it, and perhaps remit that five years I owe to Dartmoor. That's all I've got to look forward to."

"Isn't it enough, Chester?"

"No!"

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"But then you'll be clean! You can come to me with open hands, and I'll be here. Crime has had its day!"

Fay moved toward the window. "Good-by," he said, lifting up the sash and peering out. "Good-by, Saidee," he added as he glanced back in the half-gloom.

"Where are you going?"

"Somewhere to think it over."

She glided over the rug and reached for his arm. Her face pressed close to his. He felt her hot breath. Her eyes burned a message into his own.

"You're going to square it?" she whispered tensely.

"I'll think it over."

"You're going to square it?" she repeated as her fingers clutched tighter about his sleeve.

"Yes," he said hesitatingly.

"Promise me, Chester."

"I promise."

"And you'll meet those people at London Bridge Station tonight?"

"MacKeenon?"

"Yes."

"I'll keep the meet."

"You have your cap and the diagram and the greyhound — the little silver insignia that keeps a man from harm?"

"I have them, Saidee!"

"Then go, quickly!" she said, leaning down. "Go and get the cipher-key. It means so much to you —and the world!"

"Adieu!" he breathed as he thrust his legs through

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the window's opening and touched the ground with his toes.

"Au revoir, pal," she flashed with her old fire. "Go now and get ready for the game! Good-by, Chester Fáy! Good-by!"

He heard the sash softly close as he turned away from the house.

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CHAPTER VI

"EDGED TOOLS"

THE grip of a London dawn was in the air as Fay rounded the hedge, within the foliage of the house next door to Saidee Isaacs'. He found his tweed overcoat, into the pockets of which he crammed his gloves.

He went out then into the silent lane and struck toward the east with long swinging strides which carried him past constables, early morning workers and the heavy lorries which were streaming Londonward.

His eyes were sanguine and held high. His elbows bent at his sides. The absence of sleep from the moment he had been awakened by the turnkey at Dartmoor was unnoticed. He was free! The world was wide! And there was a woman in it for him!

He thought of Saidee Isaacs as he hurried along. She had come up out of the underworld. She had prospered and gained in strength and beauty. More than these two things, she represented the entire sex to him. He knew that the five years of prison life had glorified women and lowered men in his estimation.

The mystery of her position, her close touch with the Yard, her willingness to send him on the mission to Holland, which was bound to prove dangerous, caused him concern as he reached Hyde Park Corner and passed the iron-grilled fence of Apsley House.

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The City roared a warning. The rattle of busses and cabs over the pavements clashed with his thoughts. It was all new and terrifying to one who had never known fear. He felt, instinctively, that he was being followed. He fled eastward without glancing behind him. He reached the entrance to Berkeley Street and turned northward.

The two emotions struggled with his soul. Five years of silence and solitude had left their mark. The constant eyes of the guards in the prison still were there. He felt them in the center of his brain. They haunted, despite his attempt to dismiss their presence. His early buoyancy died.

He was passing through the experience that every released prisoner knows. He was fagged from lack of sleep. The excitement of the game to come had worn off. There remained only weariness and dejection.

A park, hedged about with plane trees and towered over by neat boxed-houses, brought him to the realization of his locality. North, lay Brooke Street and Oxford. A mews was at his right, between two mansions. He took this narrow passage, passed hostlers grooming horses, and emerged upon a street which would lead him to Soho Square and Burlington Arcade.

He came, with the same swift glide, to a coffee house under the sign of a brown cup. There he wheeled and flashed a defiant glance back and over the street. He searched each face that passed him. He swept the throng. No one of all of them was familiar. He was

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not being followed. The thought had been the distillate of a tired brain.

Braced on two cups of black coffee, and quieted by the dragging fumes of a cigarette, he went on into the city and was swallowed up by the three million who toiled and cheated and gamed out the day.

The alchemy of sleep — in a Soho hotel noted for its cleanliness — removed the last vestige of weariness from his mind. He glanced at his watch as he called for cold water and plenty of it. He bathed and dressed hurriedly, then took stock of his possessions.

There were the cuff-links and the pin and the cigarette-case which MacKeenon had brought to Dartmoor. There were the tweed coat, the little silver greyhound, and the bank notes and gold. More than these was Saidee's diagram of the embassy. He studied this before opening his door.

The plan flashed over his brain. He memorized the details like a draughtsman reading a white-print. He closed his eyes and repeated each item. Then, and naturally, he struck a match on his heel, held out the blazing paper and dropped its ashes along the narrow hallway where they would never be noticed.

Keen-brained from the sleep, and with eight hours ahead of him, he plunged into the opening meshes of the game. There was much to do in that short time. A plan had already mapped itself out. It would not do to go to Holland without every necessary tool for the operation of opening the strong-box. These, he knew, were to be found at a certain shop on Ludgate Street.

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He strolled north and east through familiar lanes. He stopped now and then, and glanced at the windows. His actions, though natural, had one purpose. The Yard had let him go free. And yet, he knew, there were serious-faced young men about who were waiting for him. It was not in the cards that Sir Richard and MacKeenon would remain passive. Every inspector from that dingy house near the Embankment had received orders to watch out for any overt act on the part of Chester Fay, just out and dangerous.

The many faces of the crowd flowed before him like a stream. He registered each one, but found none upon which he could fasten his suspicion. The Yard and Sir Richard would be more than keen to know how the great safe in Hatton Gardens had been opened. They had declared at the time that it was by far the best piece of cracksman's work ever done in the city.

Fay had the pride of his profession. Secrecy was the one thing which had been ground into him. He moved off from the windows and plunged into the throng of drab clerks and shoppers. He twisted and turned and retraced his steps. He dropped into the Tube and came out again. Satisfied, then, that there was no shadow behind him, he turned into Ludgate Street and sought for the shop.

It had been over five years since his last visit. The sales people surely had forgotten him. He glanced up at the familiar sign and entered. He made his way along aisles of polished cases and came to a protection ledge behind which was an array of medical instruments laid out for inspection.

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The salesman who stepped out of the gloom with an encouraging smile was the same who had been there five years and more before. Fay realized this fact with quick intuition. He watched the man's face for some sign of recognition. There was none.

"My eldest brother," he said with a winning smile, "has sent me to you. He's stationed in Mesopotamia. Rather far from here! He cawn't come himself, y'know. I'm a bit doubtful if you remember the Sir Roderick Findlayson who went with the expedition. He practiced up St. John's Woods way."

The salesman rested the tips of his fingers on the polished case and puzzled his memory.

"Awkward of me, but I just can't now. Is there anything I can do to help you out?" he asked.

Fay was on rather thin ice, and he knew it. The instruments he wished had queer names among the medical profession. It was possible the salesman was not a surgeon.

"Yes!" he blurted. "You can help me out. My brother — Sir Roderick Findlayson — wrote for me to send him certain things. Unfortunately I lost the letter. But I remember about what he wanted."

The salesman glanced at the case beneath the array of instruments. "We have the largest supply in London," he said. "Could you pick what you want from this assortment?"

"Well, there was a satch—, a doctor's bag, for one thing. Something nice in black alligator. Say a three-pound bag. Would it be about this long?"

Fay spread his hands to show two feet in length.

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"We have that size in genuine alligator for three and ten."

"Nicely!" said Fay. "I take one. Now," he added, "I may as well pick out the instruments for my brother. You can get the bag later and put them in it."

The salesman opened the case and started lifting up trays filled with highly polished instruments. Fay set aside a tempered artery-forceps which would also answer to turn a key in a lock. It was known in the underworld as an "insider."

"My brother," he said lightly, "will be pleased with this. Now what is that big instrument?"

"That is used in obstetrics."

"Just what he wanted. Put that with the forceps." Fay shaded his face and smiled. The obstetric instrument when taken apart would make a high-grade jimmy.

He leaned down and indicated a tray. "Three of those," he said, pointing to bone saws which could be employed equally as well against wood or iron.

The salesman polished these with a piece of cheesecloth and laid them on top of the obstetric instrument.

"I think that's all at this counter," said Fay, eyeing the collection. "The next will be rubber gloves and collodium. You see my brother has many infectious cases."

The salesman opened the back of a near-by case and brought out samples of gloves. Fay inspected them as the clerk went for the collodium, which was a sovereign cure for finger-prints.

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Fay's next purchase seemed an afterthought. Without it he would have been an amateur. It was a very high-grade stethoscope, such as army doctors and surgeons use to determine the right ventricle's action or the little flaws and flutters of the human heart. It had been made by one of the greatest houses in London. The clerk insisted that it was powerful enough to hear a fly walk ten feet away.

Fay arched his brows at this statement.

"How about the chest?" he asked.

"Perfect, sir. All one has to do is to press it to the left breast and place on the ear-pieces. The instrument registers every valve motion and defect."

"Your price?"

"Eight pound, ten — the same price we charged the British Royal Flying Corps. They were used extensively in the examination of the flying men."

Fay had another purpose for the stethoscope. It worked equally as well upon the door of a strong-box just over the combination dial. This is the nearest spot to the padded slots into which certain tumblers drop with a tap which would sound like a bolt falling by use of a sensitive micro-phone diaphragm.

"I'll take it!" he snapped. "That completes my purchases. Now, let me see the bag."

The bag proved all that the salesman claimed for it. Fay fondled each instrument, laid them in position, and turned the key in a little nickle-plated lock.

He paid his score and was out in the street, pressing his way like a doctor on a hurried call. He caught his reflection in a window. It was of a British surgeon, in

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cap and long tweed coat, carrying the little insignia of the office. He expected momentarily to be grasped by the arm and led to a street accident.

The matter of the instruments had been carefully thought out. There remained a second purchase equally as important. Fay was doubtful of the propriety of purchasing a heavy-caliber revolver in the open shops.

He turned into Cheapside and sauntered along. An ancient armorer's sign caught his darting glance. He crossed the pavement and stared into the window. A half-circle of British regulation revolvers lay in the center of other hardware. Also, there was a blue-steel American automatic with a business-like muzzle.

Fay smiled at this as if greeting an old friend. Mike the Bike and Big Scar, of western memory, always carried a .44 automatic. They called them "maggy-guns" or "smoke wagons."

He went inside the shop and explained to the proprietor that he was en route to Mesopotamia. "I'll take that American revolver," he said. "That, and one hundred cartridges. Never can tell what the Turks are apt to do."

Emerging from the armorer's, with the automatic clinking against the tools in the bag, he glanced at the time. It was three o'clock. Fog was drifting across the dome of St. Paul's. He had five hours before meeting MacKeenon!

Swirled now with the first grip of the game, he decided to visit one or two of his old haunts. No one would be likely to know him in the guise of a British surgeon.

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He chose to first drop in at the Monica, and from there make his way to "Jimmy's" or the St. James Hotel, which at one time was a meeting place for international celebrities and flash denizens of the underworld.

The long bar at the Monica was strangely free from patrons. Fay ordered Rhine wine and seltzer, which was equivalent to a soft drink.

The bar-maid turned away as he spun a shilling over the bar. Fay, on the alert, and with the doctor's bag between his feet, caught a glance exchanged between the girl and a lone figure at the end of the bar.

He sipped the drink and searched his brain for an answer to the signal which he had detected. It came to him with sudden flash. The man was from the Yard. The girl had recognized an old acquaintance in the plaid-capped visitor.

Fay acted with the quick wit of the professional. He glided along the bar and held out his hand. The smile he bestowed upon the inspector broke down a staid Scotch reserve.

"Well, have you found him yet?" he asked cautiously.

The man from Scotland Yard winced.

"I mean Dutch Gus," whispered Fay.

"No!" The answer was solemn and from the heart.

"And it's been five years?"

"Six and a piece."

"You're waiting for him to come in here?"

"Here or the other places. Can you help me out, Edward?"

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Fay went back and lifted his bag. He passed close to the inspector, on his way to the doorway.

"I never peach," he said through tight lips. "But, if I ever change my mind, that's the man I'll squeal on first. Good-by, MacPhee."

Fay burst through to the street and the drifting fog. He had acted on the spur of the moment in speaking to the inspector. The long watch at the Monica bar was a sample of the work of Scotland Yard. It had once been a favorite rendezvous of Dutch Gus and his mob. The watch was still being kept for the German crook who had learned safe-breaking in the States during the palmy days of the Chicago Drainage Canal. He had transgressed once too often, in the estimation of Sir Richard Colstrom.

"And they'll lag him," said Fay, turning toward the south. "MacPhee never lost a man."

He became thoughtful as he reached Blackfriars Bridge and crossed the Thames to the Surrey side. He still had three hours before meeting MacKeenon at London Bridge Station. He had forgotten his intended visit to "Jimmy's." The presence of the inspector on watch at the Monica bar was food for thought. There seemed no way of escaping the nipper grip of the Yard.

MacKeenon, Sir Richard, MacPhee, Saidee Isaacs, the cipher and the evil visage of Dutch Gus appeared in the fog as Fay leaned over the Albert Embankment and stared toward the curtain which blotted out London. Fingers seemed to reach and clutch for him. Coils were thrown. There was the south, and Brighton

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and the Cape boats, for a get-away. The bag with its gun and surgical instruments could be tossed in the Thames. No man could catch him, if he chose to exercise caution. The world was wide, and a new life in another country could be started without suspicion.

He felt in a reflective mood. Belligerency would follow this mood as certain as the dawn would rise on foggy London. He recalled the ancient vows of getting square with the police of the world. The five years of cell life — of waiting and watching — had not shaken him from his purpose to gain a little place in the sun, and there bask with the smiles of those he cared for and understood.

The cipher mission had not gripped him in the manner it should. He did not see the great commercial war which was settling upon a torn world. The factories of London, Manchester, Leeds and the Scotch districts might be pouring their smoke into the English air in an attempt to stem the tide of imports from over the North Sea. They were building the last battlements of a people who would be free. He did not care! Had not England penned him for five long years in a living hell? Was that punishment to be forgotten lightly? Was it a reason for falling in with the plans of Sir Richard and the hounds of the Yard?

He smiled bitterly. He wanted freedom of action. He had the wherewithal to gain this desire. The money in his pocket, the open road to the south through Surrey, and a change of costume would effect an escape. There was no way to prove that the Yard

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would not send him back to Dartmoor if he failed in the Holland mission.

He turned away from the stone rail and stared through the gloom to where arc lights were stretched in an unending row. They shone blurred and torch-like in the murky air. Beneath them, pedestrians and lorries moved, like a procession of sad mourners. It was the tide of London folk pouring home at the day's end.

Tapping his heel against the black bag at his feet, he saw from the corner of his right eye the arched bridges which spanned the Thames. They, also, were thronged with a dark mass of outpouring humanity.

He seemed alone. He was in the backwater of strife and bustle. An open space was between his position at the rail and the nearest sidewalk. This space was shimmered over with damp mist. Across it, flashing eastward, there passed a smart, black motor car, with a driver bent at the wheel and a single figure in the tonneau.

Fay heard, as distinctly as if the voice had been at his side, a call and a warning. It rang in his ears after the car had vanished in the shadowy street on his left hand. He repeated the words: "Look out, Chester!"

"Now, who in the devil was that?" he asked himself, standing erect and glancing after the car like a thoroughbred who had scented danger.

The mystery of anyone in London knowing his name or figure, gripped with strength. He wondered if the voice that struck across the night had been a guilty tug at his own brain. It could hardly have been

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real. He recalled that the car was smaller and of less horse-power than the one which had brought him up from Dartmoor. It was not the same motor. Nor had there been "H.M.S." plates on its trunk rack.

The roar of the city confused him as he waited. It was possible that he had but reflected his own thoughts when he heard the warning. He dismissed the matter and started to turn toward the river. His chin had described half a circle when there flashed across his vision the true warning of coming danger. It had taken him many years of training to act as he did. He ducked, stepped aside and sprang out and away from the stone rail.

A hurtling form, bunched and aggressive, crashed past him and rebounded from the stone. A bitter oath cracked the night. A man straightened and jabbed with a long dagger. Fay backed and held his hand in a warding position. It was Dutch Gus who faced him. The German crook had missed his prey by the scant margin of an eye flash.

Fay acted with the lightning dart of a professional wrestler. He knew the mettle of the man he faced. Dutch Gus was over-burly. He lacked the fine points of the thoroughbred. He held the knife like a bayonet — before him, with no chance to recover if he missed the stroke.

The jab missed by narrow inches. The crook stumbled from the force of his wasted blow. Fay twisted his head, stooped down, grasped the German about the hips, and flipped him over his shoulder. Dutch Gus crashed against the stone rail and hung there.

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Fay reached and swiftly opened his little black bag. From this he drew the revolver and held it against the German crook's head. He cocked the trigger. He waited. He thrust the man further outward. A coward's cry sounded as Fay pressed Dutch Gus over the rail and down toward the murky flood of the Thames.

A splash was followed by silence. The ripples widened and merged with the pall that hung over the river. Out of this murk there rose an arm, and then the blond head of Dutch Gus. He treaded water and then sank.

"Curse you!" said Fay, clasping the weapon and waiting for a sight. "Curse you, Dutch Gus! I wonder if that's your end?"

Fay turned, backed against the rail, and searched the gloom on the Surrey side. He waited grimly for other evidences of the ambush. He saw none, although it was hardly possible that the German had acted alone.

It came to him, as he uncocked the automatic, that in some unknown manner the German had gotten wind of the project to Holland. It flashed through his brain that, after all, there was a reasonable answer to the attempt on his life. Dutch Gus had followed Saidee Isaacs. It was no coincidence then, that she had called from the tonneau of the black car and her trailers had discovered his presence. The thing worked out. He pocketed the automatic, picked up his bag, glanced at the river, then started toward London Bridge Station. It was seven o'clock.

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As he moved swiftly, his eyes searched the throng across the pavement. He wondered if a shadow would be there. He was dealing with not only the Yard, which was too solicitous for his welfare, but also with a determined clique that had already attempted to obtain the key to the cipher. Dutch Gus had searched for Saidee Isaacs and had found her house in Richmond Hill. The German crook, or one of his gang, had held the trail — even to London Bridge Station. Fay felt gripped in the skeins of an enterprise which might have almost any conclusion.

He was not surprised to see the tail-light and then the polished tonneau of the little, black motor where it stood before the station. He crossed the street and stared at the driver. He went on and into the train-shed.

A youthful-appearing figure in a long tan coat and green hat passed him, stooped, fingered the top button of a fawn-colored spat and said tersely:

"Carry high, Chester. There's your man over by the booking office. Look out for Dutch Gus and remember your promise."

Fay set down his black bag, grasped the lapels of his tweed coat and coughed to hide his astonishment.

The figure in the tan coat was Saidee Isaacs. She finished with the spat, straightened, twinkled over the floor and darted out toward the motor car.

MacKeenon worked through the waiting passengers and touched Fay on the arm.

"This way, mon," he said. "Ye are punctual."

Fay was still staring at the doorway through which

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Saidee Isaacs had vanished. He turned and picked up the bag. He glanced at the inspector's long face. Upon it was written a sly satisfaction that one sees on old dogs that have cornered their quarry.

"The siller greyhound?" said MacKeenon dryly as Fay followed him out to the waiting boat train.

"It's in my pocket."

"Put it on, mon. It'll carry ye far."

Fay set down the bag, reached in his right trousers pocket and brought forth the insignia of the King's couriers. He pinned it in place upon his left lapel and covered it with his overcoat.

The station-master approached the inspector and indicated that the train was about to pull out.

MacKeenon held up two fingers and smiled. The station-master nodded at the secret signal. Fay felt clutched in the swing of events. He watched the Scotch detective anxiously.

"Weil, mon," said MacKeenon, "ye're off. Here's your ticket for the boat to — where ye're going. Here's twa envelopes. Guard them well. There's money in one — there's Sir Richard's instructions in th' other."

Fay reached, took the envelopes and the ticket, and crammed them in his inner coat pocket.

"How about getting through at Dover?" he asked.

"Shew th' siller greyhound, lad. They will ask ye no questions at all. Many's the time A've done it."

Fay glanced at the train. The semiphore ahead was set for "go." The steam plumed from the engine and merged with the fog at the end of the shed.

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A bell rang as he thrust a cold finger out to MacKeenon, clutched the little black bag and sprang for the running-board of a first-class compartment. The train started, stopped, then lunged on through the clammy shed. Fay opened a door, tossed in his bag and stumbled aboard. He overlooked one trifle.

MacKeenon had drawn a white handkerchief from his coat pocket — where it was most conveniently handy — and had shown all the evidences of a man doubled up with Spanish influenza.

A little Scot — with a bundle and a hacking cough — passed the inspector and clutched wildly for a hand-rail on the car behind the first-class one. He hung there by grim strength, and finally succeeded in getting inside a compartment as the train roared out of the station shed and started to tunnel the murky night.

The inspector's smile was that of a sly gray fox as he turned and hurried from the station. He crossed the bridge on a swift run, barked a surly order to the waiting driver of a two-wheeler, and settled back as the whip cracked smartly over the haunches of a perfectly good horse of the better order.

The driver knew his book. He drove northward and deposited MacKeenon at Liverpool Street Station, where a train was waiting by which a number of British North Sea ports could be reached.

Although he had overlooked it, Fay had company going to a certain neutral country, and company coming by a roundabout route.

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CHAPTER VII

PASSENGERS FOR HOLLAND

THE channel boat *Flushing* was waiting the boat train that left London Bridge Station at eight P.M. The grizzled skipper leaned from the bridge and watched the queue of travelers wind slowly along the quay, disappear into a little house and emerge somewhat ruffled in feelings.

A few of these travelers were turned back. One, at least, was bundled into a closed van, which climbed the hill and was swallowed by the night mist. This van bore the magic legend "H.M.S." on its barred sides.

Fay had some misgivings concerning the inspection he expected at the small house on the quay. He had not yet learned the value of the little silver greyhound which he wore in his left lapel. The protesting commercial traveler, who had shared the first-class compartment on the train coming down, had some difficulty in convincing three sage-faced men in the small house that he was merely bound to Holland in the interests of a Brixton firm that manufactured electrical goods.

The traveler was passed finally. He went through the door and hurried up the gangplank to the waiting *Flushing*. The three serious men turned and glanced

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at Fay, who stood with the corner of his coat turned down and the silver greyhound showing slightly.

Each inspector stared keenly, first at Fay and then at the black bag he carried. Each lifted a hand and covered a chin. Each bowed as the hands dropped and motioned toward the door through which the electrical salesman had fled precipitately.

"A King's courier!" Fay heard one say. "I wonder who'll be next."

The next to enter the dingy house on the quay was the Scot who had sprung aboard the boat train after being signaled by MacKeenon. He was passed after he had opened his overcoat, his coat, and had thrust a wrinkled thumb under a suspender strap, pinned upon which was a gold insignia that was graven with two letters, "M.P."

"Gold follows silver, tonight," said one of the inspectors. "There is something going to happen in Holland."

The boat cast off from the quay and, clearing the buoys, struck through the murk on the long leg to the Continent. A winding shroud came down the sea and blotted out every light. A moaning lifted from the waves. Above this moaning sounded the steady clanking of the Clyde-built engines which were of four-expansions and balanced.

Knot by knot, league over league, the fast boat cut through the night. The grizzled skipper pláced his trust in providence and held his North Sea course, edging as the hours went on toward the Lowland Country.

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Fay had secured a mid-ship cabin, locked the door behind the black bag, and emerged to the rail which was lined with passengers suffering from choppy seas and lunging gyrations calculated to upset the staunchest stomach.

He fished in his vest pocket, drew forth a black cigar which the electrical salesman had given to him on the train, and lighted it by a scratch of a match on the sole of his shoe.

It glowed, and cast his face in a ruddy prominence. A little old man, with a bundle, shrank against a ventilator and tried to merge with its shadow. Fay noticed this motion but saw no relation between it and his mission.

A touch on his arm denoted the commercial traveler who had been searching the ship for a companion.

"Muddy night," he said, glancing at his own cigar. "Beastly wet for my samples, which I hope are below."

Fay nodded. He drew down his cap, removed the cigar from his mouth, flecked off the gray ash, and studied the glowing end.

"Holland," he asked, "is over there?" The cigar pointed like a pistol toward the starboard bow. It swung a point and steadied. It recoiled back into Fay's mouth.

"Over there, yes," said the commercial traveler. "We'll dock at sun-up, if there is going to be a sun on this murky morning."

Fay glanced at the man. A question revolved and took form as he waited for the boat to resume an even keel. "This new war?" he asked, "this com-

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mercial thing which has come up? They say it's going to be a whale of a task, for England."

The salesman, whose samples consisted of a line of motors and rheostats, had been led straight upon his pet hobby. He was the forerunner of the horde who were to bring about the final triumph of the Allies over the *Mittel* nations. His companions swarmed in Mesopotamia, in Palestine, in Siberia, in the Balkans, and in the old markets of Holland and the North Countries.

He started upon a well-memorized line of sales talk, which, to Fay, was enlightening but hardly to the point he was after.

"A moment," Fay said. "It has just come to me, sir, that I heard a chap in the West End say something about the dye industry. Is it so fearfully important? Has Germany the monopoly? I rather thought they were making the stuff in England and the States."

"Cost too much!" declared the commercial traveler. "You see, an old dog still has his tricks. There's danger that the old dog, and I mean Germany, will come into her own again in the dye industry. She had the monopoly once, and she is liable to get it again."

Fay studied the cold end of his cigar. He waited for the man to warm to the subject.

The commercial traveler drew his cravenette coat-collar up to his eyes and pointed astern and over the rocking taffrail of the Channel boat.

"The Island, there," he said in the voice of pounds,

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shillings and pence, "is recovering from one struggle and plunging into another. The cheap labor of Germany and Russia must have an outlet. This outlet, in dyestuffs particularly, is threatening to flood the market. You say that the tariff protects England and the States. I say that the tariff does not! There are the foreign markets, open to Germany, without which no industry can flourish. What of South America and Africa and the velvet of the trade? Open to the Germans as well as to us!"

Fay watched the man's face as he asked quickly:

"This dye monopoly! Is it because of secret formulae which England has not been able to work out?"

"The nail on the head! The Germans have had five thousand chemists working on coal tar products for twenty years. They redoubled their efforts over the years of the war. They are ready to flood the dye markets and put out of business every dye maker in the world, save German. You see what that means."

Fay turned and stared aft. "So the poor crawlers on that Island are face to face with the problem of finding the secrets of the dye industry?" he inquired.

"Oh, if they had all the formulae they could bankrupt the German game! I heard that secrets were brought through Switzerland. I never learned of anything coming of them. Sort of stalemated there! I suppose the Foreign Office was hoaxed."

"Most likely," said Fay, fearing to go further in the matter. "I did hear something to that effect. Too bad!"

The traveler clutched the rail and waited for the

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boat to finish twisting on a downward lunge which followed the general outlines of a corkscrew. Fay glided off and forward. He stood in a shadow beneath the damp ladder that led upward to the wheel-house and chart-room. He grasped a stay and peered beyond the green glow which was thrown outward from a faint starboard light.

The wall of yellowish fog toward which they were ever steaming rested upon long oily rollers which were crossed by smaller waves. The North Sea gave forth a hollow sound as from some vast space. The hiss of their swift passage was like yeast in process of fermenting.

Clutched in the onward surge of the passage, he reviewed the words of the commercial traveler. There was food for thought in them. The great game to play concerned the destiny of a vast industry. Briefly, Germany was about ready to ruin the dye enterprises of the States and England. The matter hung on the thin thread of the cipher which Sir Richard had shown to him in that dingy house near the Embankment.

That, solved, would place the entire world on an equality. The little dye works could compete with the larger. The formulae would be open to any man. The galling monopoly, to come, would be removed. It all lay in that safe in Holland toward which the "fast" boat was steaming.

Fay stared at the yellow curtain and dug deep within his brain. It was possible to double back on his trail, soon after landing, and make for Scotland. From there he could take steamer to the States. It was

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also possible to work by little-known lines through Stavanger and the northern cities. The Yard had no call upon him save a personal appeal.

Freedom of action had broadened his thoughts. He no longer was the numbered thing in the stony coffin at Dartmoor. He breathed, and lived and had some right to the good things of this life.

Unclasping his hand from the stay, he turned and glanced along the deck. It was lined with passengers who huddled against the rail — shapeless masses of brown and gray and glistening waterproof.

The commercial traveler had met with a kindred soul in the person of the little Scot with a bundle. Their voices sounded above the roar of the swift passage. The Scot was, in his cunning way, pumping the traveler dry as to what he had said to Fay.

Fay turned a shoulder to them and started forward beyond the break of the pilot and chart house. He heard voices raised in the smoking-room. Pressing his face to the forward midship port-hole, he wiped the mist from the glass and peered in.

Three men sat about a table upon which was a scattering of silver and gold. At their elbows glasses perched. In their hands were cards. They swung with the ship, lunged toward each other, and straightened like dummies in a pantomime. They played their hands, and redealt. Fay realized that a game of American stud was going on. He wiped the port-glass and studied the three faces.

One was cockney with a great arching nose and a loose catfish mouth. He wore a green cravat and a

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horsey pin. The second player was stout and triple chinned. He might have been a Yorkshire horseman going across for Holland mares. The third player, whose face was almost hidden by the back of his head, interested Fay. There was that in the poise of the man which brought back deep-sea memories when certain cliques haunted the smoking-rooms of five-day boats.

This man wore a pair of smoked glasses.

Fay watched the tide of fortune through the port-hole. It was evident that between the striking of the ship's bell for three A.M. and three-thirty A.M. — six strokes and seven — the man with the glasses had increased his pile of gold at the expense of the Yorkshire squire.

Keen-brained and trained to note appearances, Fay realized that the man with the glasses had some percentage upon the game. He searched his memory for the man's name. That head and the narrow sloping shoulders were more than familiar. He decided to enter the smoking-room.

Rounding the bay of the break of the pilot-house and chart-room, and passing under the dripping staunchions of the bridge, he clasped the handle of a sliding door and pressed firmly.

A gust of mist and briny air drove through the welcome opening. Fay entered and closed the door. He moved, not too swiftly, toward a lounge where he could overlook the players, pressed a button on the cabin furnishing, and threw open his coat with a relieved motion as he sat down.

An under-steward came from aft and stared about

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the room. Fay leaned over a little table, whispered "hot Scotch" and rubbed his hands from which the oakum stains had almost been effaced.

He turned then, and stared point-blankly at the players. The man with the glasses faced him. There was a scar on the chin. There was a firm set to the mouth. There was that which told of a young man who had the oldest face in the world. It was Broadway-trained and set to the wise leer of an international swindler.

"Um," thought Fay, crossing his leg and intensifying his stare. "Ump!" he added under his breath. "That's an old friend — Ace-in-the-hole Harry. No wonder the poor squire is being trimmed."

Fay shot a final glance and turned toward the under-steward, who held the Scotch on a silver tray.

Taking the drink, he passed over a shilling and a sixpence, set the glass down, and started making tiny circles on the table with his finger nail.

"Last time I saw him," he reflected, "was at 'Jimmy's.' Time before that, was in Cairo — at Shepherd's. And the time before Shepherd's was on a Cape boat — the *Kenilworth Castle* — where he was trimming gulls by the ancient and honorable game of dealing seconds."

Fay divined with professional intuition that the fish-mouthed cockney was Harry's partner, although their voices were raised in angry recriminations.

He sipped at the Scotch, then rose and watched the game from a leaning position at the end of the lounge. The sharper dealt without apparent manipulation. His

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hands spread over the card, lifted a corner, then reached for the deck as the Yorkshire squire tossed a sovereign upon the table.

Fay watched the deal. The light was glaring. The eyes behind the smoked glasses flashed, then centered on the gold piece. The game went on with more gold entering the pot. The show-down, where the sharper won, revealed the fact that the Yorkshire squire had a queen in the hole and the dealer had a king. It was that close!

Fay felt inclined to whistle. He was interested enough to watch other deals which all seemed set and regular. Ace-in-the-hole Harry had solved mind-reading, concluded the cracksman, as he sat down on the lounge and revolved the problem in his mind.

The game closed suddenly. The Yorkshire squire rose, glared at the two players, then stamped out through the door and went aft with a string of oaths falling behind him, like chips from a whittler.

"May gol blyme!" said the cockney. "'E's a rum cove. We cawn't always win, y'know."

Harry with the long pseudonym removed his smoked glasses and stared at Fay.

"A bit o' deck would help us out," he said coldly. "I'm wondering if we make the connecting boat at Stavanger?"

Fay glanced at his hot Scotch and lifted it as the two men strode toward the door, through which they passed to the deck.

He allowed the thin shadow of a smile to cross his lips. He turned and caught a reflection of himself in

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a long mirror. He studied this object with concern. The flight of time, since last he had seen the card-sharper, had wrought many changes in his appearance. He was keener-faced and firmer of mouth. The silver-gray hair at his temples was unnatural and gave him a youthful appearance due to contrast.

"Stavanger," he said upending the glass and feeling the warmth of the liquor. "I'll remember that. Few Greeks go to that port. I wonder why he's going there?"

"Greeks," in the argot of the underworld, were cardsharpers and sure-thing manipulators. Fay despised their profession. He had an abiding belief that a man had not lost all honor who would take a strong-box or a long chance. There had been no chance in the sharper's game. The meanest thief in the world, to him, was the professional gambler.

He rose and closed his tweed coat with a quick motion. The ship's bell had struck two times, spaced close together. It was five o'clock. The Lowland Country must soon appear through the fog.

It came to him, as he stepped to the dark deck, that the one change in the sharper's make-up was the smoked glasses. They were incongruous and beetle-appearing. They struck a false note in a card game. Fay felt dimly that there was a good reason for wearing them. He sensed a mystery there. He revolved the matter in his mind and searched the deck for the two. They had disappeared into a cabin. Most probably they were dividing the wool shorn from the Yorkshire lamb.

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A bo'swain, in sou'wester and oilskins, was heaving the lead from the starboard chains of the foremast standing-rigging. He called the fathoms with monotonous regularity. "By the deep, four," rolled along the ship. A bell clanged. A jingle sounded. The screw thrashed as the helm was ported. A stumpy man, in smug pea-jacket, came out of the pilot-house, and grasping a funnel stay, leaned far forward. He searched the yellow fog which drifted athwart the bow. He whipped out a pair of twelve-diameter glasses and focused them with his right thumb.

He turned his head, lowered the glasses and pointed toward a green buoy which was passed close to starboard. This buoy bore the number "9" on its side. The wheelman put up the wheel three spokes, then steadied the ship. She groped on with careful searching until a mud spit ran beneath the fog curtain and headed their course.

"Up more," said the man in the pea-jacket. "Hard up!" he snapped with British vim. "All the way up, you!"

The ship sheered like a frightened sow and lay broadside to the spit. The screw thrashed. They wore around the point and started clamping down a fog-shrouded channel which was lined with green buoys and gas flares.

The scent of fish and lowland marshes came over the water. The clank of a hidden windmill sounded close to port. One gaunt arm pierced through the veil and then was gone. The way ahead opened and revealed a vista of smacks and crude wooden schooners. The

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veil dropped upon a scene that Rembrandt would have fancied. Fay turned away and started toward his cabin. They were reaching port. The passage from Dover had been made without accident. It had been through a sea that had been stained red by the blood of British seamen.

Sounds of commerce were on every hand as the *Flushing* bulled the air with her Mersey-built siren. She glided over oily back-water and came to a scant headway before the outlines of a high quay which was half-revealed in the yellow light of lowland dawn.

Fay opened his door, stepped into the midship-cabin and sat down on his unused bunk. He closed his eyes and reviewed the events of the passage. He made note of a number of things which might have bearing on the cipher quest. The commercial traveler had rounded out the importance of the information Scotland Yard had sent him to obtain. This man from Brixton was a forerunner in the great commercial war which was girding the world. He was a scout and an outpost. After him would come a horde of others. Devastated Belgium, Northern France and depleted Holland and Germany were open markets. They had been glutted by the Great Struggle. They were like stores from the shelves of which all staple goods had been swept.

The second event of the voyage, in meeting with the deep-sea Greek, had a different bearing on the quest. Fay realized, as he dropped his head in his hands, that a pull had come which was strong as desire, and sweet with freedom. Stavanger, where the sharper was going

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with his cockney foil, was a port out of which many ships sailed and steamed. From Stavanger it would be possible to shake the Yard and the runners of New Victoria Street. Liberty in every action was possible if he would hasten to the northern port before the Yard was aware of his dereliction. And liberty was a tempting morsel to hold before a prisoner on parole.

Fay lifted his eyes and stared at the sheathing of his narrow cabin. The ship had reached the quay. The passengers were crowded forward where they expected the gangway to be thrust aboard. Their voices, cosmopolitan mingled, broke through the silence of the mid-ship stateroom.

A grating sounded along the boat's planks. A shudder passed from fore to aft. The siren blared three short signals. A call came across the water. Light, from a mist-hidden sun, illumined the port-hole over Fay's bunk. He glanced at this evidence of day.

Bending suddenly, he reached and lifted the little black bag. The tools clinked slightly. He inserted a key and glanced at them. They were such as any doctor of surgery might have carried. There was not a particle of incriminating evidence in the bag. Fay rose, lifted a towel from a rack, glanced at its corners to assure himself that there was no marking to show from whence it came, then swiftly bound and wrapped the instruments so that they gave forth no sound as he dropped the bag to the stateroom's deck.

He searched through his pockets. The money in

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his right-hand pocket, the cigarette case, the automatic revolver on his hip, all were inspected. Replacing these, he drew out the two envelopes MacKeenon had passed to him at London Bridge Station.

The first contained one hundred pounds in Bank of England notes. These were folded lengthwise. They were crinkling new and sweet to the touch. He pocketed them and tore the edge of the second envelope. Its contents caused him to furrow his brow.

The note it contained was from Sir Richard. It read:

"S. I. informs me, via phone, that D. G. tailed you from her house, going south. She saw him pass from upper window. Govern yourself accordingly. Get wise, F., and don't overlook the trifles.

Your Masked Friend."

Fay read the note twice before he laid it in the wash-bowl and touched a match to its edge. He breathed tensely as he waited for the smoke to clear from the stateroom. It was all too evident that Sir Richard and the girl were hand in glove in the cipher matter.

There was that in the note which spoke for itself. Fay felt that it had been written more for the effect it would have on his loyalty than for the information it contained. Besides, after all, Dutch Gus had given up tailing him and had waited until Saidee left the house in her black motor.

Fay lifted his cap, brushed back his hair, turned on the water and washed the ashes of the note down through the drain, then seized the black bag and hur-

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ried through the stateroom door. His trail was a clean one. There was no evidence of his intentions, one way or the other, upon the North Sea boat.

He worked forward between protesting lines of waiting passengers. He reached the ladder which led up to the wheel-house and chart-room. There, grouped against the bay of the smoking-room, he saw the cardsharper — sans glasses and sans his wooden stare. Beyond the "Greek," as a man apart, stood the racy-looking cockney in a great tan coat, trimmed with coster buttons. Their luggage was also separated. This final touch was for the benefit of the gulls and pigeons they had trimmed on the passage over.

Fay swung and stared over the low housetops of the city. Smoke drifted across the quay and wreathed the deck-staunchions. Heavy guttural voices echoed from the pile-strewn shore. A curious crowd of Lowlanders stood on the edge of the dock and stared toward the ship. Among them were dogs and well-matured children.

"All ashore!" called the skipper from a ledge before the wheel-house. "Line this way and pass the inspectors. All bags and luggage will be opened."

Fay pressed back the lapel of his tweed coat and exposed the little silver greyhound as he stepped upon the gangplank. He felt a pressure on his back as he worked slowly up the crowded incline. He reached the funnel of the outlet — a roped-in bay where stood two Dutch custom inspectors, their broad faces gleaming with good humor and badinage.

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Behind them leaned a man with an old pipe. This pipe turned and dropped its ashes as Fay pressed forward the insignia by holding out the lapel of his coat with a steady thumb.

The custom inspectors turned to the man with the pipe. They asked a question in Dutch.

The man tilted his pipe upward with a sudden twist of his wrist and said very distinctly:

"By all means pass him! Never mind the bag!"

Fay stepped ashore. He turned to see who had been pressing against his back. He overlooked the trifle! A little old Scot, with a bundle, had already scurried behind a shed from which he peered with ferret-like intentness.

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CHAPTER VIII

LURKING SHADOWS

A SANGUINE sun broke through the Holland mists as Fay strode briskly from the docks and quays and entered the ancient city.

He took the first street which would lead him in the direction of a little hotel, at one time patronized by international celebrities of the underworld.

This hotel had fallen upon better days. The paint and woodwork about the door were new. A smug respectability beamed from the windows and out of the courtyard. A motor car, sans rubber tires, stood within this courtyard. It had been made in Germany before the war. It was still doing service for the Dutch proprietor.

Fay stood across the narrow street, set his bag at his feet and studied the hotel from a score of angles. He could cross the wide Dutch cobbles and register. It was most certain that the police would have his name, native country, and prospective business within the time it would take to attend to such matters.

He glanced about with the ranging eye of a tourist who would go on. The street and two narrow mews or lanes echoed and reëchoed with the clank of wooden sabots, the squeak of poorly oiled wagon axles, and the voices of market people who were streaming toward the quays and the canals.

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Fay studied the situation and decided there was nothing to be gained by waiting. He knew of no other hotel in the city. It would serve as a lodging for the day and the night. It was clean, quiet and somewhat out of the beaten track of those who administered the laws in that quaint lowland capital.

There is that in the super-cracksman which is close to the actor. Fay played his part to perfection as he finished his stare toward the hotel, reached down and lifted the bag and crossed the street at a brisk walk.

He banged the door open like a British traveler who had been to the continent before. He advanced to a tiny opening in a side wall, set down his bag and called for the *Hôtelier*.

The broad face of the *Maître d'Hôtel* was thrust through this opening like a harvest moon in sight of plenty.

"A room!" said Fay incisively. "Something for a day or two. I came on the *Flushing*. I'll never go back on that damn boat, sir! It's an outrage — the North Sea service!"

The proprietor was impressed. He knew that all Englishmen swore. Some swore more than others. He put down Fay's name — which he gave as "Dr. Crutcher of London" — his vocation — which was stated to be "a doctor" — and his probable stay in Holland as "less than a fortnight."

Fay followed a maid up to a second floor back room which overlooked the courtyard and the steel-tired German car. He closed the door, tried to lock it,

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then moved over a chair and pressed the top rung up and under the knob.

He removed his coat, tossed his cap on the floor and lay back on the bed with the thumb and forefinger of his right hand pressing against his eyeballs.

He had much to do and little time to do it in. He reviewed the trip to Holland. It was a wild project, if ever there was one. The only real thing in the entire matter was the crinkling Bank of England notes in his pockets and the knowledge that he was free to pass the door which led from his room. He rose swiftly, crossed the floor, and pulled away the chair. The binding bars of Dartmoor were still about him. The constriction of closed places got on his nerves.

He summed the situation up as he stood behind a lace curtain and stared at the courtyard. His keen, gray-crowned head was poised like a quick bird as the events of the two days flashed over his brain.

From the moment of his release he had been haunted by the thought of shadows. They reached and groped for him despite every effort he had made to throw them off. He knew of the wide-flung power of Scotland Yard. It never let a man go!

Then, for what reason, he argued, had they let him run scot-free? Had a net already been spread into which he was bound to stumble? Or was it the flicker of fortune's wheel that had turned his way at last?

He examined the lock of the little black bag, reached for his cap and overcoat, and strode out of the room. The yielding door was so unlike the iron horror at Dartmoor! He whistled gayly as he ran down the

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ancient steps and burst out and into the glad light of day.

The actor in him came to the fore. He thought the part he was playing. It was no matter of studied gestures and halting steps. He was English of the English! He strode into the town's better part with the step of a conqueror. He looked the British tourist to perfection. His plaid cap, his well-fitting overcoat, his square-toed shoes were his passport.

He modified his walk to a saunter. His eyes fixed upon nothing in general, but they saw everything with that vividness which is given to prisoners on parole and those who have been denied the wine of life and living.

The feeling still remained within him that somewhere in that stolid-faced crowd a shadow lurked. It was the same sinister hand which had come out with him through the guarded gates of Dartmoor. It was the long arm of the Yard, reaching, reaching. He felt its fingers and turned swiftly. He went on. No one of all that throng showed a familiar face.

He retraced his steps by rounding a square and doubling back almost to the little hotel. He searched each figure, in passing. He saw few English in that throng.

Spies, commercial agents of the seven governments, oversea soldiers on furlough, interned or invalided troops — the backwash and the riffraff of a war that was over — filled the ancient streets.

He threw off the feeling of being shadowed, and took the shady side of a broad avenue. It would lead him past the embassy wherein was the strong-box and the key to the dye cipher.

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More bold, now, and decidedly English, he advanced with head thrown back, and that keen smile upon his lips which brought answering warmth from the passers-by.

It was nice to be alive upon that glad day. The bright sun had doubled its grandeur when freed from the grip of the morning fog. The long lines of trees, the well-clipped hedges, and the rare bulbs of Holland were out in their spring clothing.

"Gad!" said Fay to himself. "This is living!"

He drew out his cigarette-case, removed a cigarette, tapped it on the palm of his hand and struck a match with a quick jerk of his heel. It came to him, as he inhaled the rich Turkish fumes, that the action of lighting a match on his heel was foreign to the country of Holland and even to the English. It was a flaw in his disguise!

"Trifles!" he said, half aloud. "That was a slip. I must be careful."

He went on and crossed the avenue at the square below the embassy. He drank in its details as he passed along. He photographed the front so that he could have made a drawing of every detail — the long windows, the high marble steps, the flunky in purple and knee-breeches, the insignia near the great door, the semi-basement with its iron-grilled apertures.

A crossing above the embassy's building drew him back over the avenue and down through the low houses of a side street. He found a passage that passed parallel to the brick barrier which fenced in the ambassador's grounds. He estimated the height of this wall as he

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hurried by it. He turned the corner, and bounded the building as he glided out into the avenue and retraced his steps toward the hotel. He now had a plan of the project. It looked like clear sailing in the night to come.

A back glance, as he lighted a cigarette by striking the match upon a stone, showed a figure descending the embassy's steps and limping in his direction. He waited and dragged at the cigarette. The man who passed was English. He had been through the war.

"I say," said Fay, hurrying after the cripple. "Would you mind putting a chap straight? Is that the Hôtel de Ville?"

Fay pointed his cigarette at the embassy building as the soldier turned.

"Is it?" he repeated. "I hope I haven't troubled you."

"Blyme no!" answered the Tommy. "Hit's the royal muckers wot do a man dirt, it his! Neutral embassy, wot? Wot satisfaction his there in that? Says I, to myself, I'll look up my brother 'Arry who was lost at Wipers. Took by the Germans, 'e was! They told me to go to Switzerland, they did. 'Ow ham I goin' to Switzerland on three bob, six?"

Fay fell into stride with the soldier, and walked at least five squares with him. He twisted the conversation around from 'Arry to a general outline of the floor plan of the embassy and the number of guards. He left his man near the British embassy. The two sovereigns he pressed into a protesting palm were well earned, although the cockney was unaware of it.

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"Hope you find 'Arry," said the cracksman, hurrying toward the hotel.

The information he had gained coincided, in the main, with the diagram which Saidee Isaacs had given to him. The additional details of the day guards, and the disposition of the embassy clerks, were sufficient to lay out the entire plan of action.

Fay wasted no time. He reached the hotel, called for mail which he knew he did not have, then hurried upstairs and entered his room. He emptied the black bag of its contents, placed the surgical tools about his pockets and under his vest so that they would not bulge, then examined the revolver.

It was loaded. It was a perfect weapon of its kind. He thrust it in the side-slit of his overcoat where his hand could reach readily. He rose. It came to him with sudden force that he had burned his bridges, save for the little silver greyhound. It would not do to have this on in case of capture.

His eyes roamed the room. A cake of very thin soap attracted his attention. Taking this, and pressing the insignia deep within the edge, he moved to the window and examined the hiding place. An opening showed, which he smoothed over by washing his hands and softening the soap. He tossed the bar behind the wash-stand where it would never be noticed.

The bag caught his eye as he stepped toward the door. He returned, picked up a few charred sticks and coals from the fireplace and dropped them inside the instrument case. He locked it and tested its weight. A maid or the Maître d'Hôtel would be satisfied with

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the substitution providing they did not force the lock.

"All set," said Fay with American accent. "When I come back to this place, it'll be with the key to the cipher or handcuffed. The coppers in this burg know where everybody lives."

He went down the stairs and out into the street. This time he did not glance behind as he hurried toward the center of the city and the railroad station by which a number of trains could be taken out of the Lowland country.

It was his intention to ride some little distance toward the German border, get off the train, and double back on foot so as to throw off any possible pursuit.

He found a map near the booking-office. The station was thronged with Germans and commercial travelers who were expecting the final lifting of the great embargo against the *Mittel* nations. England and the States were cursed in Low Dutch.

Fay made a note of the train time on his cuff with a tiny lead-pencil. He had over thirty minutes to catch the first train eastward. He passed through the station and stood on the curb whereat decrepit motor cars and thin horses clattered up with passengers.

Suddenly, with the intuition given to the hunted, he saw a familiar form dodge out of his sight and behind a corner where the traffic swirled. He acted swiftly. Crossing the street, he hurried down the sidewalk and away from the station.

Fay went on with eyes darting to left and right. He passed an open doorway. In it stood two forms.

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They had attempted to dodge out of sight, but were held by outpouring customers of the store where they had taken refuge.

Fay photographed them on his mind without turning his head in the slightest. He glided on with swift steps. A bitter smile crossed his lips as he sprang over the curb and darted between two vehicles.

One of the two men was MacKeenon! There could be no doubt of this at all. Fay had caught a side view of the Scotch inspector. His companion was a little old man with a bundle.

"And may your own bungling undo you!" Fay exclaimed as he turned a corner and darted out of sight. "I'm done," he added. "I'll never trust another copper."

He was deeply in earnest. The sight of MacKeenon had stirred every drop of blood in his body. It was not enough that Sir Richard would send him after the cipher-key. The oily chief of the Identification Bureau had seen to it that the bloodhounds of the law went along in case of a change of heart.

Fay had changed his heart. It was steeled now against the project. He flashed a plan over his mind in the time of seconds. He would abandon the quest, make for the quays, take a boat for the north, and join the two card swindlers. In this manner the Yard would be foiled, and the cipher-key could rot in the safe.

Sir Richard had underestimated his man. Fay had the memory of five years in that Dartmoor hell to spur his heels. The chief had stated that he was to go

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scot-free. The bitterness of this came home to him at the memory of MacKeenon's long keen face. The hollow eyes and sharp features of the inspector — the gaunt, trained-to-the-last-ounce of energy and cunning stamped there, was a whip held over the felon.

"Au revoir," Fay said bitterly, as he dodged and twisted and turned in his path toward the quays. "Follow me now if you can, Mac!"

There was no sign behind of pursuit or a shadow. Fay took every precaution. He approached the quays and the canals by lowland paths as the sun dipped below the western sea-mist. He leaped a causeway, went over a thin plank, and drew this ashore after him. The way ahead was narrow. The way behind was closed to all save a good swimmer.

He came to a paved road beside which was a long row of tall poplars. A windmill with crossed arms, like two combs on a pepper box, reared toward the sea. Another showed beyond gray-stucco houses and lean barns. The flat-green of Holland merged into a pea-soup fog which was rising.

A rusty steamer of the smaller class lay at a quay. Drifting smoke poured from her one squat funnel. The gangplank was down. A stream of stolid Dutch was mounting this plank. They seemed, in the gloom, like cattle going to slaughter.

Fay found a boatman who was cleaning fish at the side of the canal. The cracksman drew his coat around his thin shoulders and pointed toward the steamer.

"I want to go on that," he said.

The boatman laid down a fish-knife, tossed a fish

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into the bottom of the boat, and rose with his scale-clustered hand to his cap.

"*Ein thaler*," he said. "I go with you over there for *ein thaler*."

Fay drew out four silver shillings and handed them down to the boatman. He sprang to a thwart of the boat and waited as the fisherman got out two clumsy oars, cast off the painter and shoved the boat from the edge of the canal.

"Hurry," said Fay, muffling his face in the stern of the boat.

The rower nodded and dipped the oars into the dark water. The boat glided toward the ship. A voice called across the canal. Fay rose and stared back over the course they had come. Muffled shadows moved on the bank. A match was struck. This went out and left a flare still burning in his eyes. He touched the boatman's shoulder.

"Faster," he said. "Row faster!"

The boat reached the end of a rotting pier. Fay stretched his arms upward, grasped a string-piece and lifted himself to the cross planks.

He did not glance at the boat or the boatman as he hurried ashore and along the bank of the canal toward the quay where the ship was taking aboard the cattle-like passengers. A horn blared the night as he reached the gangplank.

He was one step advanced up this plank when a rattle and the thin honk of an auto horn caused him to turn his head over his shoulder.

The rubberless and decrepit motor car from the hotel

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thrust a pair of pale lights through the gloom. On the driver's seat of this car crouched a chauffeur who was staring at his steaming radiator.

A woman, with her form hidden by a long coat and her face masked beneath a broad-brimmed hat, sprang from the tonneau of the car, said something to the driver in a low voice and hurried in the direction of the gangplank.

Fay turned his head completely, grasped the hand-rail of the plank, and stared at this woman. Her figure, even under the coat, was familiar to him. He frowned slightly, let go his grip on the rail and backed down to the quay.

"You?" he said almost bitterly as he reached the woman's side. "What are you doing here, Saidee?"

"I came after you." Her face lifted under her hat. Her eyes were dark and purposeful. The tightening of her lips drew down the corners of her mouth.

"You came after me. Seems as if everybody's coming after me. I'm going to take this boat."

"No, you're not! You're going back, after —" She half turned and stared over the quay. "You're going back after the cipher, Chester," she said in a whisper. "You're the only one who can get it. Come on with me." Her gloved fingers pressed lightly on the sleeve of his coat. Her grip became firmer. "Please come," she added hastily. "You haven't any time to lose. You're not going away — for my sake, Chester."

He tore loose her grip with an angry jerk. "You," he said, "are no better than the others — MacKeenon,

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that hell-hound, and Sir Richard. Why didn't you let me take the trick alone? I didn't need any help. Now the job is queered — for good. I'm going to take this ship!"

"Oh, but Chester, you're not. Remember your promise?"

"Promise?"

"Yes — to Inspector MacKeenon and Sir Richard."

Fay stepped back a foot or more. He stared at the slight form of Saidee Isaacs as if he would crush her. His hands raised. His fingers clutched deep within his palms.

"I remember," he said evenly, "that they were the ones who made the promises. They said 'good by, good luck and God bless you,' and sent me on my way, scot-free, so I thought. Today — tonight — I saw that hell-hound from the yard — MacKeenon! Then along you came. Does the world know that I came here after that crib? Has it been shouted to the housetops? I'm done!"

Saidee Isaacs blazed back with sudden fire. Her voice raised as she said:

"You're only on parole! You can't escape them, Chester! Please do what they want you to do. Do what I want you to do. Then everything will come out right."

Fay turned his head away and stared toward the boat. The last passenger was mounting the gang-plank. The shore-lines were being cast off. A plume of white steam issued from the pipe aft the squat funnel.

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"I'm off!" he said with final resolution. "I'll take the old, old trail — away from you and those hell-hounds. They can't catch me if they try."

"And me?" asked Saidee, with none of her old fire.

"And you can tell them I was with them till they rounded on me. They know me! A crook has got to be trusted if you want him to play square. They've shadowed me from London. They're still sniffing on my trail. But water breaks it, and Saidee, it's good-by!"

"Don't go, Chester. You'll be sorry."

Her voice had taken on an open threat. He caught the note and smiled bitterly.

"You weren't that way once," he said, thrusting his hands in his pockets and drawing his coat about his knees. "Once, you were a pal. The best pal a fellow ever had. Now you're hooked-up with MacKeenon and Co. You're working for the Yard. How did you get that house — that little motor — those clothes? How did you get them?"

The old fire flamed her eyes. She backed away and motioned for him to go. Her hand dropped to her side. She waited.

"Good-by!" he said, turning. "Tell your friends of the Yard it's no use looking for me. I'll be in —"

"Dartmoor in three days!" she exclaimed, walking toward the decrepit motor car without glancing back.

Fay hesitated the fractional part of a second. He was of two minds. Saidee had hurt him with her last thrust. It was like her to say that. It was also a dare. He took it by swinging, striding for the gang-

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plank and dashing up its slope as two deck hands seized the handles to draw it aboard.

The propeller throbbed. A hoarse blare awoke the birds on the bank of the quay. A small group gathered and watched the ship ware out and take the channel toward the sea. It clamped down the dark waters and rounded a point upon which was a blue light.

Fay climbed up the forbidden ladder leading to the pilot-house. He strained his eyes. The motor car with its twin cones of white fire was still on the quay. In the tonneau of this he saw Saidee Isaacs standing. Her hands were at her sides. Her veil was lifted up and over the brim of her hat.

Suddenly, with a quick gesture, she drew down the veil. The car turned clumsily and made for the dark aisles of the town.

Rolling mist blotted out both shores of the channel. The ship passed painted buoys from which she sheered like a frightened sow in a pen. The way ahead was found by reversing and keeping bare steerage-way. A projector of yellowish light stabbed from the pilot-house. This was turned on and off as each buoy was raised.

Windmills loomed above the low lines of the dykes. Fishing boats with furled sails and quaint deck-houses astern swung at anchor. Once the fog lifted sufficiently to reveal a long road running over a causeway which stabbed like a white dagger through the night.

Fay descended the ladder and stood in the gloom of the forward starboard boat which was drawn aboard and lashed to the davits. He allowed his right

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hand to coil over the butt of the American automatic. Its cold chill struck through his body. He was in no mood to be thwarted by MacKeenon or the Yard. The bitterness of a vain project distilled black thoughts in his brain.

He refused to allow himself to think of Saidee Isaacs. She was gone, and forever, he thought. He steeled himself against his better judgment. He wanted the wide places where he would be free from shadows and reaching hands. Then, and afterwards, he could consider the entire matter. It had been too soon since leaving Dartmoor for him to have found himself. He knew this with the intuition of the released felon. A man's mind was a delicate thing. It could not adjust itself over night or during the period of a few days. It wanted weeks and months.

A plan took form and substance as he waited by the boat. He did not even know the ports of call of the ship he was on. Any question toward finding out would excite suspicion. The purser would be around for the fare. Fay wondered, with a light laugh, what port he would name. Any one would do as a guess and then if the ship did not touch at that port, he could explain that a mistake had been made. A fugitive was safer without a set plan.

A Dutch village was passed to port. The low roofs of this settlement had scarcely been swallowed by the mist when Fay felt the ship swing her bow and reverse the propeller. Bells clanged in the engine-room. A stolid head appeared through the dark opening of the pilot-house. Deep-sunken eyes, beneath a cloth cap,

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stared forward and over the vessel's bow. A denser mass showed there. This mass took the form of another ship which was passing in the night.

Two blasts sounded from the siren aft the squat funnel. These were answered as both ships hugged the banks of the canal. They glided by, starboard to port, with a scant fathom's distance between the rails.

Fay leaned outboard, grasped a davit-stay and studied the faces of the passengers on the boat. He ran his eyes down the line. He felt the answering stares. Broad faces and keen ones were there. Flashily dressed travelers were sandwiched between burly burgers. Children stood on the high places of the crowded deck with their bow legs supporting grotesque bodies.

It came to Fay, with a pang, that these were refugees and passengers from England. Some were returning to the invaded districts of Belgium. Others had been sent back to claim their own. They were the last wave receding from the war. They would land at the Low-land city he had quitted so hastily.

He searched anew for the name of the boat. It had undoubtedly left a northern British or Scotch port that morning. The stern passed. Fay leaned further out-board and squinted his eyes. He made out the name.

Harwich of Newcastle.

His eyes lifted to the taffrail. A lone figure stood there. A pair of gleaming eyes flashed over the dis-tance between the passing ships. A heavy brow was pulled down by a muscular contraction.

Fay closed his lips in a hard firm line. He drew himself back and into the shadow of the boat. He

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peered out from this position until the ship had merged within the pea-soup fog.

The man at the stern had lived too long. He was Dutch Gus!

Minutes passed with Fay in the same crouching position. He had received a facer. There was no denying the fact that Dutch Gus was alive. That individual was bound to the Holland port for no good reason. He had escaped from the Thames and had come on to settle accounts. Perhaps he was after the key to the dye cipher.

Fay straightened himself with an effort. He sauntered around the stern of the life-boat, drew out his cigarette-case, removed a cigarette, lighted this with a swift scratch of a match along the rail and went aft with his eyes searching for a deck steward.

He found one in the doorway of a midship cabin.

"Beastly," he drawled. "Beastly awkward of me, wasn't it?" he added. "I've gone and left Holland without my luggage. Can you tell me where I can get off this ship?"

The steward pocketed the shilling Fay pressed into his reaching palm. He pointed toward a darker mass in the fog.

"There," he said in heavy English. "There, in ten minutes, sir. We put in at Swartzburg for any cargo that may be on the quay."

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CHAPTER IX

ROBBERY UNDER ARMS

THE ship had no sooner touched the dock than Fay leaped ashore and hurried toward a yellow light which marked a half-hotel, half-tippling place of doubtful aspect.

He pressed the door open and glided inside the single ground-floor room. A group of burgers and broad-hipped Dutch girls were sitting at the tables. A Holland maid was bending over the tap to a huge cask of beer.

She straightened, pressed back her hair and stared at Fay as if he were a ghost. Her eyes dropped under his level scrutiny. He turned toward the drinkers.

"Is there a motor car anywhere about this town?" he asked. "I must have one!" His voice was keen and demanding.

A German deserter from Hindenburg's shattered armies rose, set down a stein, and threw back his head.

"*Engländer?*" he asked drunkenly. "*Du bist ein Engländer?*"

"Worse than that!" declared Fay. "I'm American! I want a motor car or a fast wagon. I must go back!" Fay pointed toward the east. He dipped his hand into his right-hand trousers pocket and brought forth a palm-full of English shillings and sovereigns.

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"Here, *Fräulein,*" he said to the girl at the beer-cask. "Drinks all around. You join me, *bitte?*"

Fay's knowledge of German was limited. He knew no Dutch at all. He labored under the delusion that the language of the Fatherland would serve for Holland. The presence of the German soldier had seemed to carry this out.

The maid's stupid stare told him that he had not been understood. He turned toward the German deserter. It seemed irony that he should use such a man for the furtherance of his purpose.

"Here, Heinrich," he said, passing over a gold piece, "get busy! Drinks all around and then a motor car. Ask these people if there is one in the burg."

The German was not too drunk to know the color of gold. He said something to the girl in Dutch, snatched up his stein, drained it and hurried out through the doorway. Fay tasted the bitter beer brought to him by the maid, lifted his eyes over the edge of the stein and strained his ears.

A hoarse siren blared the night. The ship was leaving the quay. The hour was not yet ten. Fay darted swift glances over the drinkers. He studied a picture which might have been painted by Rubens or Franz Hals. A slow fire burned in a great open fireplace. The crude tables, the broad-faced roisterers, the silent girls with their long pig-tails and meek eyes held him until a sound was driven through a quarter-open window. This sound was the exhaust from an open muffler. It had an American suggestion in its sharp notes.

Fay carefully avoided the nearest table, bowed to

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the maid as he drew his coat about his knees, and pressed open the door. He stood under the front thatch of the inn. He smiled with quick appreciation as the round, moon-like discs of two headlamps burned through the fog, shot off across the Lowland, then steadied and grew brighter.

"A flivver!" he exclaimed. "By all that's holy—it's from the States."

A Dutch boy in an impossible make-up of leathern coat and bright, peaked cap drove up and almost catapulted the drunken German to the road's cobbles as the brake went on with a protesting squeak.

Fay lifted the German soldier from the dashboard and steadied him on his wobbling legs, where he stood like a limp mannikin ready to topple over.

The Dutch boy slowed the engine by putting up the throttle lever, under the wheel. He stared blankly from Fay to the German.

"All right," said the cracksman as the door of the inn opened and let out a mellow light. "I paid him. I'll pay you, too, when you land me over there." Fay pointed toward the east through the night fog.

The boy twisted the wheel, partly pressed his pedal and advanced the throttle. The flivver spun and almost struck the German with the rear mud-guard. Fay leaped aboard and showed the boy a shining yellow sovereign in the hollow of his palm.

"Drive like hell!" he said. "I'll show you the way—along the canal."

The soldier shouted something as the tiny car rattled over the cobbles and darted into the one street

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of the town. Fay drew his cap down over his eyes and leaned out. He blinked as he noted the kind of tires the auto was equipped with. They were sections of rubber hose bound with wire and rope. They bumped and clattered. They drove a series of shivers up his spine.

"England's embargo!" he groaned.

The Dutch boy pressed the pedal through to second speed. The car rumbled over a causeway and turned into a white road which was lined with stem-like trees of a species Fay had never seen. He held tight to the bouncing seat and peered through the cracked windshield. The two searchlights rose and fell with the engine's revolutions. One moment the road was dark and pit-like; the next, the way was clear for a full hundred yards.

The boy knew his business. This much Fay had decided. The light car roared with open muffler through sleeping towns. It swerved at a bend of the canal and struck off across a dyke-country beyond which glowed the lights of a city.

Low barns and houses, crowned with the gaunt arms of silent wind-mills, flashed by. A shout struck out from a crossing. The boy went on with his blue eyes fixed on the road and his hand on the throttle-lever.

Fay dragged out his watch by the chain and attempted to find the time. He bent down, struck a match and held it to the crystal. It was close to eleven o'clock. The fog had lifted from the dyke-land.

A squeak of brakes and the smell of hot oil announced the first turn leading into the city. Fay rose, after

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replacing his watch, and stared over the windshield. He recognized the quays in the distance. He saw the tall spire of the Hôtel de Ville.

"Right here!" he told the boy as the car stopped. "You can go back. Take these and buy a set of tires!"

Fay handed over the sovereign capped with a second one. He shot a keen glance at the driver. The boy had removed his cap and was bowing with his broad face distended into a broader smile.

"S'long!" said Fay, hurrying off.

He heard the roar of the engine and the rattle of loose mud-guards and clattery wheels. He did not glance back. The time was short. It was some little distance to the embassy building.

To a man who had prowled the South Kensington Museum and gotten away with its choicest jade and jasper — to the first cracksman then living — the problems of the dye cipher and of opening the embassy's safe were not impossible. Fay had taken harder boxes without leaving a trace. The stethoscope he carried was twenty times more delicate than the drum of a human ear. The combination-locks were fitted with pads, but these would not prevent some slight sound when the tumblers dropped into their designated notches. The Hatton Gardens affair had proved the truth of this.

There was also a little affair in Paris in the old days before the war. Fay recalled its details as he glided through the dark streets in the general direction of the embassy.

Dutch Gus, of dire memory, had boosted him up to

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a window from an alley. The German crook had waited outside in the guise of a drunken night-rounder — a part he often played in real life. Then the German's eyes had popped at the sight of swag, loot and plunder obtained in the time of minutes, — not more than fifteen.

Fay chuckled at this job which had been so easy. He had gone through a vault door, a day door and the steel-ribbed keister by means of a stethoscope. This enterprise, of course, had been on an ancient French combination box whose tumblers, to him, were like piano-keys to a virtuoso.

And now, Sir Richard had picked him as the best man handy. The chief had cunningly played upon the heart cords of patriotism without slopping over. The humor of the situation was its saving point. The chief had failed by a double-play. Dutch Gus had appeared from out of the murky waters of the Thames. Fay knew in the bottom of his heart that the reason which was urging him on was the old one of jealousy. The protection of the Yard, the call from Saidee Isaacs, the honor of the enterprise which might save a world from a galling monopoly, all were less than the quick flash of the German crook at the taffrail of the inbound steamer.

Fay reviewed these things and smiled bitterly. He nursed no delusions. He was going to take that box for the reason that a lesser crook and a stool-pigeon was embarked on the same enterprise. It was hardly likely that Dutch Gus, and any of his mob he might have with him, would strike on the first night. He

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resolved to leave them an empty keister, as far as the key to the cipher was concerned.

In all the thoughts which flashed through his brain as he neared the embassy there was none of the right or the wrong of the matter. No maudlin sympathy for a fallen felon had ever quite reached his heart. He was steeled against an ordinary assault from that direction. The five years at Dartmoor had taught him caution on a desperate enterprise. Possessed with superior education and the keen wits of a modern stock broker or man about town, he regarded crime as the natural outlet for his energy. It had not paid, but this had been on account of the trifles. There was the thumb-print in London which had brought the braying bloodhounds of the Yard down upon him. There was a dropped hotel key in Chicago. There was a legion of mistakes.

He went on cautiously and set his mind on the problem ahead of him. He was muffled to the eyes. The tools were safe about his clothes. The American automatic was in his right-hand coat pocket. Also, he had not neglected the rubber gloves which were to protect his fingers. The matter looked promising. Already the great clock in the Hôtel de Ville had struck the maximum. It was after twelve!

A light mist swirled through the streets with a promise of more. He watched it wrap the staid, snug-nested houses in gossamer folds. A thin troop of stragglers wound homeward — German merchants out at elbows since the Great Embargo, roisterers and women in yellow skirts who had followed the armies until they

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walked like grenadiers, burgers with pot-bellies and torches, who took the middle of the streets from force of habit during the desperate days of the war.

Fay disappeared down through the gloom of a well-remembered lane, waited a moment, then tiptoed his way over stones till he reached a narrow alley which cut between the embassy and a cloth merchant's somber exterior. The high-barred windows on both sides of him were dark and staring.

Glancing back for a final test, Fay reached upward and waited with his arms extended to their limit. He narrowed his eyes as objects stood out in the gloom of the passage.

A skulking form passed the entrance to the alley. This form had hesitated for the fractional part of a minute. Then it had disappeared, going in the direction of the Hôtel de Ville.

A low oath dropped from Fay's lips. The skulker might have been a guard to the embassy. Again, it might have been a drunken roisterer. Whoever it was, there was danger of detection.

Fay clinched his teeth with much of the old nerve surging through him, grasped the top of the wall with his fingers and was up and over like a quick alley cat.

Gripped with the game, he worked swiftly. The garden wherein he stood was filled with well-trimmed bushes and the scent of spring blossoms. He crossed a soft bed by stepping on stones. He stooped at a low window and tested his weight against the sash. Rising then, and listening, he drew on a pair of rubber gloves and curled his fingers.

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The window might be connected with an alarm. He decided to take no chances. The panes of glass were large enough for a man to squeeze through. He chose one at the bottom and rapidly cut through the putty with the point of a knife. It flaked off and fell at his feet. The glass came out with a prying attempt at the upper edge. A breath of moist air greeted him. He had broken through to the basement of the embassy.

Canting his head, he listened. Hearing nothing, he thrust an arm through the opening he had made and worked his body after the arm. His rubber-covered fingers touched a rug on the floor. He half turned, squirmed without sound and sat down with his face toward the window.

He kept this in view as a possible get-away as he moved over the floor without rising to his feet. A faint yellowish light marked the outlines of the removed pane. All else within the basement room was black.

The ticking of a clock sounded at his right. He stared in this direction and waited with every sense alert. It was like receiving a warning of the presence of life.

He moved on with both hands outstretched. He reached the edge of the rug. His fingers coiled over the fringe. Beyond this was polished wood which felt smooth to the rubber gloves.

Then, suddenly, he became aware of the muffled breathing of one in torture. Groans sounded in low agony.

Fay had no light save wax matches. He sensed

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the general direction of the sounds and moved slowly in their direction. Every nerve of him was alert. The heavy drag of the automatic was reassuring. It could be used at an instant's notice.

The gasps and groans were nearer now. He reached out and touched a man's form. About this form were many turns of heavy cord. Across the man's mouth was a stick held in place behind the ears by a sash.

Fay leaned down and strained his eyes. The yellowish light from the open pane sifted through the room. Its details came out like figures on a fogged photograph-plate.

The man, trussed like a stuffed partridge, moved both legs and rolled over. Fay saw a pasty countenance alongside a cap upon which was gold braid. Purple waves mounted up this man's neck. The gag was a clever one.

"The embassy's night-guard," said Fay in a whisper. "Poor chap, I was worried about you all along. Somebody's beaten me to it."

He realized with quick thought that the guard had been set upon by a number of men who were now at work on the great strong-box upstairs in the embassy. They had entered the building in some manner, surprised the watchman, trussed and bound him and carried him down into the basement where he would be safe.

Fay leaned over the guard and hissed into his ear:

"Vas has happened?"

This was as near the language of the Lowland country as he would ever get.

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"Brumm! Brumm!" choked the guard through the gag. "Brumm! Brumm! Brumm!"

"All right, old fellow," said Fay, "if that's the way you feel about the matter. I'll leave you right here and go on. Cheaters have been cheated before. I'm going to take a lone hand."

Fay reached toward his pocket, drew out the American automatic and pressed the cold muzzle against the guard's purpling neck. He backed away, crawled around the obstruction and started toward the flight of steps at the front of the basement. He heard a slight movement above him. Plaster or dust fell to the floor.

The craftsman took stock of the situation. He now could see every corner of the room. The yellow light from the window aided his cell-strengthened eyes. The five years at Dartmoor had made his sight keen as a hawk's.

He touched the first step with his hand, rested his weight on his palm, and grasping the automatic, started upward toward the ground floor of the building. He took his time and worked on the edge of the steps. Here he knew the least sound would be made by a prowler. It was a little trick stolen from the old days.

Coming to the next but the last step, he pressed his body against a side wall, moved back the cocking mechanism of the automatic and advanced its barrel, inch by inch.

There were certain sounds in that vast room which told him that the safe was being ripped apart. Metal rasped against metal. Rivets were being drawn.

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Asbestos or plaster of Paris fell to the floor. Also, there was the squeaky swinging of a great door.

Fay peered around the corner and studied the view with dry smiling. It was as if someone else was doing the work cut out for him. Forms moved in the faint light. Oaths in German rolled from out the vault. A tool clinked against another.

The light swung and revealed the picture. Fay studied it keenly. It was framed in the mellow age of tapestries and portières and heavy draperies. Portraits of former ambassadors stared from the walls.

The great outer door of the strong-box was open. The day door hung on one hinge. A candle glowed within the safe. A man stood on a pile of books. He was jabbing viciously at the keister door, which had resisted his stoutest efforts.

Fay realized that this man was Dutch Gus. There was that in his burly form and thick-lipped oaths to prove the fact. Two others of the German mob were arranged about the strong-box. They were gathering up tools in the belief that their leader would soon succeed in opening the inner compartment.

The professional smile which changed upon Fay's face to supreme disgust would have caused Dutch Gus considerable concern had he seen it. Fay hated a bungler worse than a squealer. The wreckage about the embassy's strong-box would have disgraced a gang of blacksmiths. It was the work of tyros at the game.

He waited and watched. The hour was no later than one. There was ample time to checkmate the Germans. It was evident that they had made a hasty

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descent upon the embassy by order of someone high in authority. The German Government was vastly interested in getting the key to the cipher. Heaven and earth would be moved to keep it away from the English or American agents.

The swaying light of the candle inside the vault went out with a sudden puff from Dutch Gus's lungs. A rattle of gravel sounded on the window panes at the front of the room. This rattle was repeated. A pane cracked.

There appeared at the doorway of the strong-box a face aglow with suspicion. Eyes darted toward the windows. An oath struck through the room.

Fay raised his automatic and stared forward. He had sensed with the divination of the professional what had happened. The skulker in the street was the lookout for the mob inside the embassy. He had rounded the square and thrown gravel against the windows as a prearranged signal of danger.

His voice rose on the outside. It was a tipsy call in South German:

"*Du bist verrücht, mein Kind.*"

There was a warning in the simple words. Fay crouched beside a desk and watched Dutch Gus. The German bungler was of two minds. He turned toward his confederates. One of these grasped him by the arm and pointed toward the door.

"*Schnell!*" he exclaimed. "*Ja, das ist Hugo!*"

"Yes," said Fay, tersely. "Yes, the jig is up!"

Dutch Gus snarled as he hurtled toward the desk. Fay dodged him nimbly and glided to a deeper shadow

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of the room. More gravel struck the windows. It was insistent!

The action which followed was blurred. Fay held his position and watched the three Germans stagger toward the front door. They dropped tools on the way. Dutch Gus turned as the knob was turned. He stared backward like a baffled boar that scented a trap.

Fay heard shouts outside. There followed a clatter of heavy heels on the steps leading to the street. A jimmy came hurtling through the air and dug a hole in the plaster of the wall. It was Dutch Gus's parting shot. His burly form squeezed through the opening and was gone with a parting snarl which sounded like "*Suchen sie Schutz!*"

Acting swiftly now, Fay leaped over the floor of the room, slammed the front door, bolted and locked it, then glided toward the shattered outer doors of the safe.

He had scant time to work in. Already shouts and calls echoed the streets. Wooden sabots clacked over the cobbles. A whistle shrilled the night. An alarm bell started to ring.

"Curse you, you Dutch bungler!" said Fay, springing to the pile of books and feeling over the plate of the keister. His rubber-covered fingers found the combination-dial. This had not been injured. He whirled it rapidly four times to the right as he thrust his free hand under his vest and drew forth the stethoscope.

Working with every sense alert, he clapped the diaphragm of the delicate instrument over the dial's

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spindle and thrust the ear-pieces into his ears. He listened as he spun the dial three times to the left and then moved it notch by notch.

A click, as faint as a dropping feather, sounded. He reversed the direction of rotation and listened for a second click. It came as a rattle outside the door of the room denoted that guards were attempting to enter. A stout cry rolled through the embassy.

Fay did not hear this sound. His every effort was strained on opening the door to the keister where the cipher-key was located.

He turned the dial to the left and caught the third click. He needed now but one more to open the keister.

Slowly his fingers moved, with his brain centered on catching the faint sound. It seemed a century of time. He was on the point of giving up and repeating the entire operation when the last tumbler fell.

Dropping the stethoscope where it dangled from his ears, he grasped the handle of the door and pulled it down. It caught and then went into its socket.

Fay opened the door and reached for a match. The floor shook with the tramp of feet. The air was vibrant with menace. Fingers seemed to reach for him through the gloom. Lights flashed beyond the windows.

He scratched the match on the wall of the keister and shaded it with his palm. Inside was a dusty row of yellow envelopes, each bound with soiled ribbons. Above these, on a shelf, stood the many seals of the embassy. Over these and alone was a packet bound with string.

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Fay let the match singe his gloves as he eyed this package. It could be no other than the one left by the agent who had fled to Holland and there met with a sudden death.

He reached and brought down this packet, held the last glow of the match to its top and read the name scrawled there:

"Otto Mononsonburg."

He dropped the charred stick and wheeled. Already the front door of the embassy was giving. The way seemed blocked. He took his time, however. He pocketed the stethoscope, crammed the packet into his left-hand coat's slit and closed his hand over the butt of the automatic as he glided out and into the room.

Faces appeared at the windows. They seemed like pumpkins on racks. The door opened slightly. A long-barreled rifle was thrust through. Fay stepped to one side and toward the stairway which led to the basement.

He paused then and glanced for a last time at the windows, turned toward the front door, then sauntered over to the basement steps and went down.

The trussed guard had raised himself to a sitting position. The bandage was still across his mouth. Each end of the stick stuck out like a quill. Fay took care to avoid him, stepped to the window, threw the catch and lifted the sash. He glanced out.

The garden was deserted. The sounds which came from the front of the embassy had not yet reached the side alley. There were any number of these sounds. They reminded Fay of an aroused bee-hive.

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He passed through the window, pressed down the sash gently, removed his gloves, and stood erect. The glueyness of the fog prevented any view of the clock in the tower of the Hôtel de Ville. It also shrouded his movements.

He sprang over a garden bed, grasped the coping of the stone wall and vaulted the obstruction with a half effort. He landed in a crouching position on the alley pave.

His hand raised, with the automatic held before him. He felt his overcoat pocket with his left hand to see if the package was still there. He rose to an erect position and started to saunter up the alley and away from the embassy building.

A shout behind him told that he had been detected. He turned his head and glanced over his shoulder. He dropped into a swift run. Two burgers, coming abreast, were hot on his trail. Their threats in Dutch echoed and reëchoed. Fay hurried on.

He came to a corner around which he turned. His eyes swept the street. The way ahead was clear. To one side, however, and deep within a hallway a form stood wrapped to the chin in a long coat.

Fay darted by this form with every muscle straining. He expected a shot or a cry to stop him. He turned his head as he was half-way down the first block. His eyes were bright now.

He saw the two burgers puff around the corner. They were running as one. Their legs were out-thrust when the muffled figure in the doorway extended a cane, tripped them up neatly and hurried away.

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Fay chuckled and went on. He was safe! It had been the reaching arm of Scotland Yard that thrust out the cane. No one but MacKeenon could have done that thing half so cleverly.

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CHAPTER X

A RETURN STROKE

VIVID memories remained in Fay's mind as he reached the great Hôtel de Ville and turned toward the hostel where he had left the little silver greyhound.

The key to the dye cipher was safe with him. The blundering attempts of Dutch Gus and the German crooks to obtain this key showed that pressure had been applied from some quarter. The attack upon the embassy's safe on the same evening of arrival proved that the German gang had wind that Scotland Yard was on the case.

Dutch Gus had failed and the matter was closed, thought Fay. He felt rather kindly for MacKeenon's fortunate trip-up. He glanced over his shoulder as he passed out of the shadow of the Hôtel de Ville. He heard, as he walked on tiptoes, the far-off braying of the police who had most certainly lost his trail.

A bell still tolled within the city. A light showed here and there. For the most part, however, the way was through dreaming street and snug-wrapped houses whose drawn shutters seemed like night-caps.

Fay sniffed the morning fog and found it laden with promise. It served as a mantle and a cloak. It would be hours before the Lowland sun broke through the mist. By then, he figured on being far from the

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scene of the robbery. There was nothing whatsoever to be gained by remaining in Holland. He had decided to deliver the cipher-key to Sir Richard Colstrom at the house of the Two Lions in West London. At that same time he would demand a full pardon and the freedom to live by no man's leave as long as it was within the law.

Old scores would be paid. The way was bright. He searched his mind for any overlooked trifles. There seemed none. He went on, turned a corner and crossed a dark street. He knocked boldly upon the stout door of the hotel.

A second and a third knock brought no answer. A fourth, however, was followed by footfalls inside and then the sudden lifting of a sash. Fay stepped back to the curb-line and glanced upward. The moon-broad face of the proprietor was beaming down upon him. A night cap was on his head.

"The doctor!" said Fay with easy assurance. "Come, let me in!"

Fay heard an exclamation concerning the British and the hours they kept. The sash went down. The proprietor appeared at the door with his great keys jingling like some grotesque St. Nicholas.

"Beastly night," said Fay, passing him and climbing the stairs.

He opened his door and stepped into his room. He found a candle near the wash place where he had burned Sir Richard's note. Shading his eyes, he stooped and glanced beneath the bureau. The thin cake of soap, wherein he had pressed the silver grey-

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hound, was within the dust. He reached and secured this with a swift motion. He stood in the center of the room and turned it in his fingers.

There was much to do and little time to do it in. The police of the city could not be rated as total fools. The work at the embassy showed a foreign mind. No man in Holland was capable of opening an inner keister without leaving a trace. Fay broke the cake of soap, took out the insignia and pinned it to his left lapel. He moved toward the bed. It was his intention to place the tools he carried in the bag, wait until the proprietor was slumbering, and then make his way out into the streets and away from the town. There were the quays. Ships sailed and steamed for many ports. Freedom went to the bold!

He had stepped half across the room when a sound in the hall caused him to poise on his toes with his hand held rigid before him. He waited with every sense alert. The sound was repeated. It was the soft fall of steps. There was also the swish of skirts. They rustled silkily and out of place in that hotel.

The door opened slightly. Fay cursed himself for not locking it. Another trifle had come up. He whipped his hand down to his right coat pocket and coiled his fingers about the butt of the American automatic as he lifted its barrel inch by inch.

The door kept opening. It revealed the edge of a purple hat, a shoulder and then the olive features of Saidee Isaacs. She stepped in and pressed the door shut. She turned with her skirts swishing.

"Did you get it?" she asked.

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Fay was mute for once in his life. He figured the turn of events as he watched her eyes change color and grow soft. She had hired the auto belonging to the hotel upon her arrival in Holland. It was natural that she should stop at the same hotel after her vain appeal on the quay. Perhaps she had hoped against hope that he would return to the cipher quest.

"Did you turn the trick, Chester?"

He uncoiled his fingers from the automatic revolver and laid a finger across his lips. He nodded with a faint smile as her hand came to him impulsively.

"I got it," he said. "Dutch Gus was on the steamer coming in. I couldn't let him take the safe. As it was, he came near getting away with it. Sit down, Saidee, and I'll tell you what happened."

He waited as she turned toward the bed and glanced at it. Her chin swung back and upward. Her eyes shimmered over with a moist glaze.

"We must leave here, right away," she said. "If you got the cipher-key Sir Richard sent you for, my work and your work is done. We're fearfully rich and respected. Why, Chester, the police will bow every time they see us."

Fay lowered his voice as he said:

"Not the ones in this town. You're right— let's get out of here. Have you any luggage?"

"Just a small bag."

"Go back to your room and get it."

"It's outside your door. I heard you come in, and dressed." She glanced at her reflection in the mirror over the wash place. She tilted her hat as he

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crossed the room, removed the tools from his pockets and breast, opened the little surgical bag and dumped them inside.

"I've got everything," he said, turning. "We'll tiptoe downstairs and make for the Schwartz Canal. There we can wait till I get a line on the boats."

"MacKeenon and another are in town. Hadn't you better try and connect with them for protection? It's wonderful to have the police with you, Chester."

Fay darted her a sudden look of suspicion. He had not yet learned to trust the police. They were his natural enemies. The five years in Dartmoor had not quenched his old fire. She sensed this as he dropped his hand to his pocket and turned his face toward the door.

"They were only helping you," she said. "Sir Richard was so interested in the cipher, he thought, perhaps, you might need assistance. That was all there—"

"We'll drop that subject, Saidee. Drop it now. Sir Richard is like them all—he can't be trusted. He told me I could come here alone—scot-free. He'd get better results if he'd trust a man. We fellows from the inside are not as black as some people imagine we are."

"But this cipher-key is so fearfully important, Chester. Where have you got it?"

Fay tapped his left overcoat pocket. "Right there!" he said, glancing from the door to her. "Right where it stays, too, Saidee, till I see Sir Richard."

"What is it like?"

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"I didn't open the package. I'm not going to. Let Sir Richard do that — after I have a word or two with him."

She frowned, with faint lines showing at the corners of her mouth.

"It might be something we can memorize," she suggested.

"It'll keep."

"But Dutch Gus and all those Germans are after the clue. Why, Chester, you don't know how I've worked — in Geneva and Zurich, and in Austria before it surrendered. Three or four men were killed over the cipher. You may lose the key. Let me see it."

He reached upward and buttoned his overcoat by twisting the buttons with his finger. He lifted the surgical bag and turned toward the candle.

"When you explain everything," he said seriously, "we'll be pals again. As it is now — you are too close to Scotland Yard and the hounds to suit me. You knew when I was coming out of — that place. You knew I was with Sir Richard in London. You knew I was bound for Holland. You got here almost as soon as I did. You left a mighty nice little house in the West End. Who paid for that house? Who bought you that motor? You say, 'Be pals,' but you are not the Saidee Isaacs I used to know. Come on! We're going out of this trap. The police may hammer on the street door any minute. Dutch Gus ripped the big box in the embassy wide open. He made more 'rumble' than an old-time German Prince plundering a French chateau."

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Fay stooped and pinched the candle's wick with his fingers.

He backed across the floor and found that she had barred the way to the door. He could see her face from the light that sifted in through the curtain.

"Let's go," he said as her breath fanned his cheek. "Open the door, Saidee."

"Wait."

He felt some pity for her at that instant. The lines about her mouth had softened perceptibly. He had heard that a man who knows little or nothing about a woman — idealizes her.

"What's the matter?" he asked pityingly. "Are you going to cave in and cry on account of the cipher-key? I'd give it to you, Saidee, but there is still danger."

"It isn't that," she said as she twisted the knob and peered out into the hall. "I wanted to see if you were really in earnest about taking it to Sir Richard. I don't want you to take it — anywhere else — Germany, for instance."

"Never," whispered Fay as he seized her arm and guided her through the hallway.

"Now on tiptoes," he said as they reached the stairs. "Hold your bag high and walk on the side of the steps. That's right, Saidee. Now back toward a window I saw. The door is locked toward the street. I heard him lock it."

Fay unclasped his fingers from her arm and tried the window. It led out into the courtyard. He raised the sash, guided her through the narrow opening, turned and backed out with both bags. He drew down the

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sash until the window was closed. Then he stepped to her side in the gloom.

"This way, pal," he said with a world of quiet assurance. "There's the old auto you hired. And there's the way out. I don't believe we got a rumble. We're like two actors beating a board-bill, aren't we?"

She nodded her head, the plumes of her hat bobbing. She did not do any of the things which might displease him. She walked at his side with swift strides. Her glance was before her without the furtive backstare of the amateur. Her voice was natural and pitched in a low key. They passed a sleepy burger or two. Once a watchman stepped out and glanced at them. Fay remembered this and took a side street to throw the police off his trail.

They reached the first of the taverns and the quays. Murky, yellow fog wrapped the dykes and lowland. Spars and masts showed. Funnels and ventilators were thrust over the roofs of the warehouses. Sails hung in buntlines and gaskets. Fisher craft loomed through the mists. The tang of the sea was there in that inland port.

"Four o'clock," said Fay, listening to the strokes of the bell in the Hôtel de Ville. "The police drag-net will be spread. We'll go this way, Saidee."

He grasped her arm and led the way down between two storehouses whose ends were thrust like fingers out into the wide pool of the Schwartz Canal. A small boat with oars was moored to the left-hand pier. Fay dropped into this, reached and caught the bags as she tossed them down, then assisted her to a damp seat

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in the stern of the boat. He cut the painter with his knife, listened a moment as the boat drifted with the tide, then he got out the oars and started rowing toward the opposite bank.

A winding shroud dropped around them. A billowing mass of wet sea fog rolled over the city and blotted out the view of the shore and the shipping. There was no sound save the rattle of the oars in the locks. Fay bent his back and leaned close to the girl.

"We're getting on," he said. "We'll carry high, Saidee, and go over the top of this cipher matter."

She shivered slightly and drew her skirt about her knees. Her head turned toward the shore they had quitted. She attempted to pierce the gloom. It was opalescent and filled with strange lights.

"The police," said she, "will miss this boat."

"I'll kick it out when we land."

"Holland Yard will coöperate with Scotland Yard."

"Let them. I'm going to take the cipher-key to Sir Richard, in person. He had no right sending MacKeenon on my trail."

"You still have it, Chester?"

He rested an oar against his knee and drew out the package. "I've still got it," he said. "Otto Mononsonburg left it in a safe place — for a German. There were three doors to take before this package could be gained."

He glanced up into her eyes. To him they had hardened, despite her weariness. There was an eagerness there he did not like. Calculation had been foreign to her in the old days.

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Replacing the packet and taking up the oar, he said:

"You've changed, Saidee. If I thought you were going to double-cross me, I'd sink this boat. Your heart, your mind, your soul is in getting the package. What does it mean to you?"

She bit her lip and granted him a wan smile. "It doesn't mean so much to me, Chester, as it does to others. You really don't know what you have done tonight. You don't know!"

Fay swung at the oars and tried to sight the shore of the canal. He sheered the boat and started rowing vigorously.

Between strokes he said:

"Come out with the truth, Saidee. Remember the old days. What have you been doing since then? How did you happen to get mixed up with the Yard? Don't you know you can't trust the police?"

"Your viewpoint will change, Chester."

"Never!"

"Yes — it will. It will if I ask you to change it."

He was silent at this. He rowed on until the bow of the boat struck a sunken pier close to the shore. He rose, braced his knees against a gunwale and glance upward. A rotting quay was close at hand. There was a ladder coming down from this quay. He reached, waited, then grasped a rung of the ladder. The boat steadied as he drew it alongside the pier.

"I'll go up first," he said. "You hand me the bags and then come up. Push the boat away when you get on the ladder. Push it hard, so it'll float a long way before the police find it."

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He saw her nod her head. He climbed upward, being careful to avoid the broken rungs of the ladder. He turned at the top and reached down to her. She passed up the two bags which he took and laid on the edge of the pier. Her hand grasped his extended fingers. She thrust out the boat as she leaped the gap and trusted herself to him. They stood in the gloom at the brink of the dark canal.

"All clear," he said, after listening. "There goes the boat out toward the sea. We'll hurry inland and find a quiet spot. You're damp. The feathers of your hat look like Avenue A."

She drew her jacket about her breast. Her eyes were bright as she turned and pointed toward the two bags.

"Carry them," she said. "Lead and I'll follow. It's almost dawn."

"We'll find a dry spot," said he, lifting the bags and starting over the quay. "We'll lay low till noon, then we'll figure out the best get-away from Holland. I think the railroads will be watched."

"I could carry the package to London without being suspected."

He squared his shoulders and walked on. His hands gripped the bags with white strength. She realized that she had not gained his confidence in the matter of the cipher-key. Her feet dragged. She glanced back now and then.

He came, after taking a long detour, to another canal which roughly paralleled the one they had crossed. There was a tiny wooded isle in the center

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of this canal. A narrow bridge of planks stretched from the shore to the island.

"A summer place," he said. "That'll do, Saidee."

She held her hand up toward the sky. A mist was falling. An opal vapor was beyond this mist. The world seemed wrapped in a great yellow blanket.

"Beastly morning," he said as he dropped the bags to his feet. "Suppose they could follow us to here?"

"I don't know. I wish the sun would come out. I'm soaked."

"Come on," he said, lifting the bags and starting over the plank bridge. "We'll pull one of these up and then we'll be safe for a time. Where are we?"

She tiptoed over the bridge and watched him go back and remove the center plank. This he pulled ashore. They walked up through dew-laden grass and entered an open summer-house whose quaint carvings and low benches, made from natural wood knots, showed the hand of a Holland builder.

He sat down, drew his coat around his knees and thrust out his shoes. "I'll wager, Saidee, we've beat the coppers," he said, fishing for a cigarette and lighting it with a sputtering match. "Now you come clean with what you know and we'll go back to London together. I'll see Sir Richard, get an unconditional pardon, and we'll go to the States. The war is nine months over."

"But another begins," she said as she stood before him. "Don't you know the most terrible struggles are the silent ones — the commercial ones that go on in the dark?"

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"Like the underworld against the police."

"Please don't mention the underworld. I've been out of it for five years — so have you. We've squared it. You know my people. I know yours. It's time we're living up to our blue china. Thievery is worse than cheating at cards. You should use your talents within the law. Let's play the game according to the rules."

He watched her and puffed at his cigarette. She walked back and forth over the planks of the summer-house. The soles of her high-heeled gun-metal shoes were wet. Her skirt hung dejectedly. The ruching about her neck had lost its starch. The crowning touch of the drooping feathers was pathetic.

"I've dragged you through hell," he said, indicating that she should sit down. "I could make a fire, but someone might smell it."

She went to a rail and stared up the canal. A lighter gray indicated that the sun was breaking through the clouds to the eastward. The rattle of blocks and the creak of a sail going up floated down to them. She turned away and sat down with her hands folded in her lap. She twisted her finger-rings.

"What happened to you when you joined Scotland Yard?" he asked point-blankly. "Did they pinch you for something?"

"No, they did not! They wanted something done and I was about the only one who could do it. The war gave me an opportunity to show them what real good I could do. They paid me for it — paid well. England never forgets!"

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Fay thought of Dartmoor. "You're right!" he exclaimed, tossing the cigarette butt away. "England never does. So they adopted you and you squared it and you acted as their agent in Zurich and other places!"

"Their agents never admit they are their agents."

"Well put!" said Fay. "I've guessed right, though?"

"Yes."

"And you had something to do with getting that cipher out of Switzerland?"

"I had a lot to do with getting it to England."

"And when you got it to Sir Richard — the key was missing?"

She laid her hand over his left overcoat pocket. "You've finished what I couldn't," she said.

Fay leaned back. He listened, then drew out his cigarette-case and selected a cigarette. She watched him intently.

"It's after six o'clock," he said as he struck a match. "See, it's cracking dawn everywhere. The fog will go and leave us sitting in the open. Suppose we plant the bags, walk ashore, and try the north bank of the Schwartz Canal for a ship out of Holland. We don't care where it goes, if it gets us to England."

"It would be better for me to look for MacKeenon and give him the package. He will give us a receipt which you can show to Sir Richard. That receipt will free you from the five years hanging over your head, Chester."

"I don't play the game that way!" he said, rising and staring down at her. "I'll be my own messenger.

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I was sent after a thing, and I got it. That hound, MacKeenon, might claim the credit. He might say I fell down on the job. He's looking for a reputation."

She realized that he was not to be moved from his purpose. Her eyes blazed defiance as she sprang up.

"Have it your own way!" she said. "But, Chester, you're foolish! Don't you know that Germany would give a million pounds out of the Spandau Tower — to keep England and the States from solving the cipher? It means Germany's financial ruin in the dye industries. The world learned how to make potash, during the war — it hasn't learned how to make good dyes cheaply. The whole thing is in that cipher."

"I saw it, Saidee. There were hundreds and hundreds of sheets of paper with letters on them. The letters seemed to be grouped — three to a group."

"Oh, I worked on it. We all worked on it! I even got little Danny Nugent from Soho to try his hand. Remember Danny? He used to stay awake nights working out ciphers so the police couln't read them. He says the dye cipher is impossible — that it follows no known rule."

"Sir Richard told me that," said Fay. "Well, we got the answer," he added, glancing keenly around. "We got it, Saidee, and we're going to deliver it in person. We —"

She clutched his arm at that moment.

"What is that moving up the canal?" she asked tensely. "See it, Chester! Is it a boat, close to the bank?"

He drew her down and stared through the latticed

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bars of the summer-house. A shadow moved within the bank's shadow. A ripple showed like the gleam of a silver wing. Sounds of oars in locks floated to them. Then, and suddenly, all was still. A murky billow rolled over the lowland and blotted out the canal from view.

He reached and drew the bags to him. He thrust his fingers within a crack and lifted a sodden plank. Leaves and moss were beneath the flooring. A toad hopped away.

"There's room here," he said, pressing down the two bags. "We'll come back for them when we find a ship."

Replacing the plank, he rose and stared toward where he had seen the shadow. The fog had thickened. He could see nothing save the dark surface of the canal.

They crossed to the shore, after he had closed the little bridge with the board. They glanced back, then hurried on toward the Schwartz Canal. The pathway they took was winding and long.

It was a mile below where they had first crossed the Canal in a boat, before he stopped and pointed ahead.

"A ship," he said. "See the masts?"

They went on through the lowland path and came to a bridge. The draw was closed. Burgers and lorries passed from bank to bank. The smell of fish and clams was in the air. The fog had not yet cleared from the surfaces. Above the fog, windmills and spires showed in spectral outlines.

Fay led the way to the gangplank of the ship. He

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paused there and studied its outlines. It was a rusty tramp, engaged in the North Sea trade. Its one funnel bore the Blue-D mark of the Holland line. A row of white doors on the boat deck indicated that passengers were carried.

He told Saidee Isaacs to wait as he turned and climbed up the plank. A sovereign pressed into the hand of a Dutch steward, who stood at the head of the plank, gained an instant ear. Fay took two state-rooms on the starboard side after ascertaining that the ship would steam within an hour, and that her destination would be Stavanger, with Lemvig, in Denmark, as a port of call.

"You go aboard and wait," he said as he descended the plank and moved to her side. "I'll get the bags and be right back. The ship sails in an hour for Stavanger. From there we can double to Scotland by the Aberdeen Line. From Aberdeen we can catch the Royal Scotch Mail for London."

"Be careful," was all she said as she started up the plank.

He hurried back to the bridge, crowded between two burgers who were carrying nets, and gained the opposite bank of the canal. He took the path with his head held high, his arms down at his sides. The fog was thick. There were sounds ahead, of creaking windmills and of lowland cattle.

He went on, picking the dry places between the puddles. He came to a marsh with white stones in a row, across it. The fog hung heavily. The way ahead was through a clinging veil.

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Suddenly a whistle shrilled the damp air. A blare sounded behind him. Fay leaped to the bank of the marsh and started running down the narrow path which would take him to the plank bridge and the little summer-house where the bags were.

He struck, with sudden force, a taut wire which was stretched across the trail. He went forward and down upon his knees. His hands were deep in mire. He tried to raise himself, and twisted sideways. His feet were snared.

Out of the fog, on either side of him, there burst two muffled figures. Each had an arm over his face. Both clutched revolvers. One was Dutch Gus!

A blow from a stone thrown by a third enemy drove the cracksman's head down into the swamp. He attempted to reach his right hand back for his automatic. He felt his senses go, after a whirling struggle to retain consciousness. A second stone spattered mud at his side. A voice cautioned moderation.

Hands crept over his overcoat and then under his vest. The stethoscope and the surgical tools were drawn out. The packet in his pocket decided the searchers. Dutch Gus had found what he was after. He rose and called the name.

"Otto Mononsonburg! Here it is, boys!"

A second whistle shrilled within the fog. Fay lay still as the patter of feet sounded and then died to echoes. He drew up his arm and passed it over his head. Blood was on his fingers. He lifted himself slowly on his right elbow. He stared about and then

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staggered to his feet. He went through his pockets. Everything had been taken. His hand lifted to the lapel of his coat. The greyhound was still there.

"They left that," he said slowly. "They left that. Which way did they go?"

He gathered himself together with a final effort. Hot blood surged to his cheeks. He found his cap and pulled it on. He searched the pathway in the direction of the summer-house. The footprints pointed the other way. He retraced his steps and reached the edge of the marsh.

A Bank of England note lay between two stones. It had been dropped by Dutch Gus. Fay picked it up, folded it, and went on toward the Schwartz Canal like an Apache after scalps.

He reached the bridge and stepped into the stream of burgers. He saw them eyeing him. The reason lay in his blood-stained face and muddy overcoat. He crossed to the south bank and turned toward the ship.

Grimly determined to have the thing out, he decided to tell Saidee Isaacs what had happened, and then take up the search for Dutch Gus and the cipher-key. He passed the first of the shore lines. A seaman in a torn blouse was standing by these. A voice was bulling from the ridiculously high bridge of the freighter. The screw churned.

Fay shouted and leaped for the gangplank. He climbed upward and reached the deck. There was still time to get Saidee Isaacs ashore. He would need her now.

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A face that was stamped with unforgettable memory stared out from a cabin. A door closed with a slam. Fay backed against the rail of the ship and passed his hand over his forehead.

Dutch Gus had fled to the same ship! They would make the passage to Stavanger together.

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CHAPTER XI

CHECKMATED

FAY'S first movement was a start of surprise. He gripped the rail and waited as the dingy Dutch ship backed, starboarded, then started to turn in the confined waters of the canal.

Over him surged a rage which mounted in hot waves of blood to his temples. He stood before the door, behind which crouched the man who had set the trap in the Holland marsh, and who held the cipher-key.

He felt caution vanish in one desire. He bunched his muscles and hurtled toward the door. He struck it with staggering force. A crash resounded above the sounds of shore-leaving. Seamen hurried in his direction. Seeing red, and grimly determined to smash through to Dutch Gus, he glided back against the rail, then lunged forward — this time with double force.

The stout door was immovable. One panel gave, however. Through this opening an arm was thrust. A funnel of crimson fire stabbed the night. A bullet clipped a piece from the rail. A roar sounded as a second shot was fired from an American revolver.

Fay staggered to one side of the door and wiped his face. He had not been struck. The blood that showed was from the old stone bruise. A sailor clutched his arm. He swiftly turned.

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"There's a crazy man in that cabin," he explained. "Open it up so I can see what is the matter with him."

"I dank you better look out," said the seaman. "I dank I better see der capitan. Ya, dat fellow is crazy!"

Dutch Gus thrust out the automatic revolver. A Holland mate appeared and swung down from the boat deck. He stared at Fay and then at the smashed panel.

The cracksman pointed toward the door.

"You've got a mad passenger. He almost killed me. You should put him in irons," he declared firmly.

The mate glanced at Fay. He turned and advanced toward the cabin door. The automatic was jerked inside. A table or shelf was held over the opening. The crook was taking no chances. He had barricaded himself inside the cabin! A mattress and a blanket were stuffed in the opening.

Fay saw the uselessness of arguing the matter. A bo'swain and two seamen conferred with the mate. A purser came up. Fay grasped his arm and asked:

"Where is the lady I was with? What is the number of her cabin?"

The purser jerked his head toward the stern of the boat. Fay followed him through the gloom. The ship was gliding by the shores of the canal. The fog was heavy — impenetrable. The siren aft the funnel blared a long-drawn warning. Bridges were swung to let the ship pass. Fisher boats were drawn out of the way.

Saidee Isaacs stood at the rail in the stern of the

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freighter. Boxes, bales and crates formed a barricade between her and the cabins. She had not noticed the commotion in the forward part of the ship. Fay dismissed the purser and glided to her side.

"Come to your cabin!" he exclaimed bitterly. "Dutch Gus has stolen the cipher-key! He's aboard. But I'll get it from him! — I'm in this thing, now — all the way!"

"Where — when?" she questioned eagerly. "Checkmated?"

Fay stared at the sea over the stern of the ship. His face grew gloomy with thought. It came to him with the force of a blow that he had been careless in the matter — so careless that it would be very hard to explain to Sir Richard.

"Yes, he beat me to it," he said, lowering his voice and backing against the rail. "He's got the package that contains the key in his cabin."

"You dropped it — lost it?"

Fay pressed his hand over his forehead. A stain of blood was on his fingers as he drew them away.

"It was when I went back for the bags — the thing happened, Saidee. I'm not over it yet. I got what I deserve for being so careless."

The cracksman paused and stared into her crimsoning face. The olive beauty was gone. In its place had crept a saffron hue which seemed to center in her eyes. She stamped her foot on the deck.

"Come on," he said wearily. "Let's go to your cabin. Climb over these bales. Look out for that tackle. Now through these crates."

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He seized her arm and guided her through the last of the deck stores. They mounted a short ladder and hurried forward. The two cabins assigned to them by the purser were upon the opposite side of the ship from the one occupied by Dutch Gus.

She hastily got out a key, twisted it in her trembling fingers and opened her door. She entered and switched on the light. He followed her after a glance up the deck. He drew her door closed.

"Now, explain everything," she whispered as she leaned forward and studied his blood-stained face. "Just how did you come to lose it?"

Fay drew off his cap and tossed it to the bunk. She helped him with his overcoat. She stood near the door as he rolled up his sleeves, glanced swiftly at the blood stains, then started pouring water from a racked-pitcher.

"Wait till I clean up," he replied, lathing his hands. "Dutch Gus took everything. They knocked me out and went through my pockets. The package — my money — the revolver — everything is gone. It reminded me of Chicago — only worse!"

She caught the laugh in his voice. It reassured her. He was far from being beaten.

"Have you any money?" he asked, turning his hands toward the light and staring at them.

"Yes! Plenty! Thank goodness, mine wasn't in my bag. But almost everything else was!"

"You don't happen to have a gun?" He dipped his face into fresh water, mopped his hair, then reached for a towel.

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"I've a little one. It's loaded."

"Better give it to me. I'm going to get Dutch Gus before this ship reaches land. He can't get away with what he has done. Part of his gang is aboard. I don't care. He's lived entirely too long, for the good of the world, Saidee."

She caught the new, determined note in his voice. It steadied her. She stooped, turned up the bottom of her skirt and drew out from a secret pocket a tiny silver-plated revolver of superior make.

Glancing at it, she dropped her skirt and thrust it into his reaching hand.

He twirled the barrel, pocketed the revolver and put on his coat, overcoat and cap.

"I was pretty rough," he said apologetically. "You'll have to forgive that part. I'm going after Dutch Gus, Saidee."

"Be careful. Can't you wait till the ship lands?"

"No! It'll put into Denmark. Germany has agents there who will come aboard and take Dutch Gus with them. It's now or never."

Fay stepped to the door and moved it partly open. He stared out. Turning his head, he said:

"The fog is lifting — I see dykes and the open sea. I'll go around on the other side and wait by his door. I won't let him out. You try this side and see if you can find any of his pals. There were two or three of them. Perhaps they didn't all come aboard."

"Is there any way we could wireless MacKeenon?"

"Too late for that. The ship will put into Denmark early in the afternoon."

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She watched him disappear through the door and glide toward the stern. Arranging her hat in the mirror and frowning at her disheveled appearance, she hurried to the deck and started forward.

Two skulkers by an outswung life-boat turned their faces away and pretended to watch the shore. She saw that they were Germans and that their shoes were caked with marsh-mud. She turned at the pilot-house and glanced back. They were eyeing her sharply.

Fay stood by the rail directly in front of Dutch Gus's cabin. He raised his cap as she hurried in his direction. A steward and a deck hand had nailed a barricade before the shattered door. No sound came from inside the cabin.

"All right," said Fay, without moving his lips. "He is trapped. They think he's crazy. He can't get out, but we can't get in. The captain says he'll call the port officers when we reach Denmark."

"And some of them will be German agents."

Fay admitted this by a slow nod. He backed against the rail, hooked his heel into a netting and eyed the door for all the world like a man who was there to stay.

She realized what was passing in his mind. The time was slipping by. Already the open water had been reached. The ship would soon be in the North sea. A slight rocking foretold the seas to come.

Glancing toward the bow, she puckered her brow Her thoughts were on the cipher-key. It was in the hands of Dutch Gus. He well knew its value. He had followed her from Holland to London and from

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London back to Holland in the quest. There seemed no way to get him out of the cabin before the ship put into port.

Fay dropped his heel to the deck. They were out of ear-shot of the steward and the deck-hand who were standing guard over the remarkable passenger.

"I've a plan," she said with the brevity of a man.

"What — is it?"

"Set the ship on fire and get him when he comes out."

Fay glanced at her in admiration. "Good!" he said. "Good idea, but —"

"But what?"

He turned and studied the sea. A fog draped the lowlands. Beyond, rocks and hills rose. A ridge followed the coast line. The wind was from the north and west. Sailing craft dotted the ocean.

"If we burn this boat," he said to her. "If we do — and I can do it — we might burn him with the cipher-key. He couldn't get out of the cabin soon enough. This ship's loaded with inflammable crates."

"But we must do something."

He lifted his chin and stared at the funnel and the pilot-house. He turned and counted the small-boats. His eyes darted swiftly over the superstructure. They fastened finally upon a companion with a hand-rail. It led downward to the engine-room. A grimy Dutch coal-passer was leaning over the rail, smoking a pipe. His shirt was open to the waist. His belt was a black-tarred rope's end.

"I've got it!" said Fay, suddenly. "See where that

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hatch leads? Look, Saidee! It leads to the stoke-hold and the engine-room."

"To the bottom of the ship?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"I'm going around the deck and count the boats. I don't think there are but four. There's not more than six or seven passengers. The crew can't number over fifteen — counting the engineers and the stokers. Twenty or twenty-two souls — all told. We'll get Dutch Gus out into the open where we can handle him. Come on!"

"Are you going to leave him alone?"

"Yes! He won't trust that cipher-key to anybody. It's sealed. He won't open it. He's certainly got it with him. It'll be with him when the crash happens. Go to your cabin. I want you to stay there till I come for you."

She followed him around the stern. He opened her cabin door, after a shrewd glance at the two Germans by the life-boat, and went in.

"Stay here," he said. "We're sure to be watched, together. I'll be back in ten minutes. I'm going below, and if this ship is what I think it is — we'll get the cipher-key. You look out every minute and watch the Germans. Follow them if they go to Dutch Gus's cabin."

He darted away from the girl and around the stern of the ship. Already a heavy swell was lifting the bow. There was a promise of more seas to come. The fog had lightened in patches. Vistas showed, framed by

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dragging vapor like the ropes of huge Zeppelins. A glint of sun slanted over the coast of Holland. The ship was skirting the coast line. It was in danger of floating mines which had broken loose before peace had been declared.

He paused in his steps, after descending the ladder and advancing part of the distance to the engine-room companion. The Dutch stoker, with his pipe, was still taking the air.

"Can I go down?" Fay asked as he pointed toward the deck. "I'd like to see the engines."

"Engines, *Ja!*" said the stoker, removing his pipe and pressing the bowl with a broad thumb. "*Ja! Ja!*"

"Thanks," said Fay, grasping the curved hand-rail and turning in his descent. He glanced at the waves apprehensively.

He reached the grating and stood in the gloom between a rusty bulkhead and a triple-expansion engine. He saw, high over his head, a row of open port-holes. He had marked these from the deck. They had given him the plan to save the cipher-key.

An oil-incrusted engineer passed without noticing him. Fay started aft. There was a maze of injector-pumps, bilge-pumps, condenser-pipes and steam leaders on the starboard side of the engine. He saw the hand wheels of the sea-cocks. These were well down on their threads in a closed position. He glanced at the open hatch.

His chance came as the same surly engineer shouted an order and vanished through the bulkhead-door which led to the stoke-hold. It was a free and easy

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ship such as is found in the coast service of Holland and the North Countries. He worked swiftly as he opened three of the sea-cocks. He paused on the ladder which led to the engine-room companion. Running water sounded within the space between the double skin of the ship. Bilge muck seeped along the gratings. An oily patch glistened and reflected the light from a yellow lantern.

Fay descended the ladder and waited at the foot. He was not sure that he had done everything necessary to sink the ship. There might be an automatic stop on the sea-valves. An indicator bell was liable to ring. He leaned and listened. Sounds came to him of shovels scraping over the iron plates in the stoke-hold. There was a smell of hot oil about the engine room. The clanking of the engines seemed slowed for some reason.

Gripping the palms of his hands with his finger-nails, he waited for someone to come aft and report the water. It would be easy then to explain that he had come down the ladder to investigate the matter.

An oath in Dutch sounded from the stoke-hold. A coal-passer threw down a shovel. There was an argument between the engineer who had gone forward and the stoker. Hot words rolled through the bulkhead door. This would serve to gain time. Fay suddenly glanced at the deck. It was almost a foot deep with brine.

He turned and climbed the ladder swiftly. He passed the Dutchman at the engine-room companion, who was still smoking his pipe. The mild eyes of the man

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made no sign. A heavy veil of fog and mist rolled over the ship's bow and wrapped the standing rigging.

Fay stared about the deck. A bo'swain stood in the chains on the starboard side. He swung a lead line but did not let it go. The skipper leaned out of the side door of the pilot-house. His eyes were on the fog.

A sudden sickening lunge of the bow showed that the ship had taken aboard much water. This action escaped the seamen. They stood at their position — unaware that the deck had lowered toward the surface of the water.

Fay thrust his hands into his overcoat pockets and climbed to the boat-deck. He felt the cool surge of victory. A few minutes more and there would be no saving power to keep the vessel from a watery grave. Already it was water-logged and sluggish.

He turned and saw Saidee Isaacs standing in the doorway of her cabin. She was watching the two Germans who were sheltered by the long-boat. Fay moved along the canted deck and grasped her arm.

"Get ready for trouble," he whispered buoyantly. "Have you anything in the cabin you want? You won't have a chance to get it later."

"What have you done?"

He loosened his grip and smiled at the thought of the open sea-cocks. "I've done enough," he said. "I didn't think it could be done. This is a sleepy ship."

"Have you set fire to it?"

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Fay leaned against the cabin sheathing and marked the nearness of the sea.

"Not quite as bad as that," he said, pressing his hand against the sheathing. "I've scuttled her, though, or think I have. I opened almost everything with a wheel on it, below. As soon as the alarm is given, I want you to hurry to the after boat and pull the plug. One boat ought to be enough for the crew and passengers. There will be a sort of a panic. They'll all get away, though, except the man we want. He's nailed tight in his cabin."

Fay stepped to the rail and leaned over. The reaching waves which curled to the scupper holes seemed like white fangs. The alarm had not yet been given!

"Tell me what you have done," she asked again.

"Opened the sea-cocks, Saidee."

"But — I don't understand."

"You will! This won't be the first ship that has been sunk in the same manner. I don't think there is any way to save her. See, she's listing to starboard. Hear the crew?"

They stepped to the cabin door. The Germans by the life-boat had vanished. A running of footsteps sounded overhead. The hoarse voice of the captain blared through the fog. An oiler burst through the engine-room companion and staggered forward.

"She's sinking!" he shouted in English. "Der ship is sinking!"

"I hope it is," said Fay. "The fools haven't sense enough to shut off the sea-cocks and start the bilge pumps. A little black water in an engine room is very

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disconcerting. Come, Saidee," he added. "Dutch Gus will be driven from his cabin like a rat from a hole."

She walked past him. He saw her climb to the after boat and jerk at the landyard of the wooden plug. The cord broke. He passed around the pilot-house, grasped a hand-rail and lowered himself to the starboard side as the ship lurched and her bow went under a northern wave.

Pandemonium seized the decks. The crew and the engine-room force lost their heads. Their one thought was to outboard the life-boats and get away. Burly forms loomed through the fog. Knives slashed at the boats' lashings. Fay heard a cry from aft. A boat had already been lowered. He glided along the canted deck and saw that the door to Dutch Gus's cabin was still barred. The German crook had been deserted by his companions. The planks, nailed in place by the purser and the deck hand, were stout ones.

Fay waited until Saidee Isaacs came through the fog and the sea-spray. She was water-soaked and frightened. She had seen the crew deserting the ship.

"Get by that forward boat!" he ordered. "I'll be there in a minute. The ship will float a little longer. Stand by, Saidee, and wait for me!"

He grasped the rail and edged toward Dutch Gus's door. Stout blows indicated that the crook was trying to pound his way out. The panels had been shattered. The way was barred by the planks which were nailed to the sills.

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The cracksman grasped the end of one of these, braced his feet against the cabin-sheathing, and jerked the plank from its nail hold. He dropped his hand swiftly to his side pocket and drew out the tiny revolver. Poising it, he waited grimly.

First the shock-head and then the evil, heavy-browed eyes of the crook appeared. These were followed by his shoulders.

"Get back!" snapped Fay, thrusting forward his revolver. "Get back — you — Get back!"

Fay moved toward Saidee Isaacs. She was standing helplessly by the boat's falls.

"Cast these off," he said, bending and untwisting the ropes from the cleats. "That's right, help! Now get into the boat. I'll lower it. See, it goes out and down. The water isn't far."

A reaching comber lapped over the bow of the doomed freighter and curled along the upper decks. Fay braced himself against this flood. He saw the boat lift and then drop into a trough of the waves. It crashed against the ship's plates. Saidee Isaacs was thrown against a gunwale. She raised to her knees and glanced helplessly up at him.

He turned and darted a swift survey of the canted deck. Dutch Gus was crawling through the opening between the planks. The stern of the ship was a swelter of foam and curling eddies. A small-boat, crowded with Dutch seamen, tossed like an egg-shell upon the crest of a wave. It disappeared in the hollow between two great seas.

Fay climbed over the rail, waited, then leaped the

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distance for the small-boat. He landed in the stern and fell sideways. He rose and grasped the gunwales; Saidee Isaacs's face was not more than a foot from his. Her dark eyes had opened to their widest proportions. Her hat and waist were sodden with brine.

He smiled reassuringly. "Buck up, Saidee!" he said. "Think of poor Dutch Gus. Watch, when he jumps."

Wonder broke through the beauty of her eyes. She turned and stood erect. The dingy freighter was on the verge of its last plunge. The starboard rails were under the sea. A single figure climbed for the highest places. It appeared on the top of the pilot-house. Fog wrapped the standing rigging. Wind and mist blotted out the view.

The view returned. The figure was now close by the funnel. Hands were raised impotently toward the heavens. The German in Dutch Gus had caved. He cried, and the sea mocked him.

Fay loosened a pair of oars, sat down, and swung the bow of the small boat toward the ship. He sensed his position and bent his back. The ship went down in a geyser of white foam. The upper deck-cabins and ventilators were sheered from their holding-bolts. The sea churned with white wreckage.

Out of this wreckage there appeared a bobbing head. Fay swung the boat and rowed in the direction of this head. He waited, inboarded his oars and rose with the tiny revolver clutched tightly in his hand. Saidee Isaacs leaned over the bow. She pointed toward Dutch Gus.

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The German crook was going down for the second time when Fay leaped forward and reached out his right hand.

He caught a firm grip upon the swimmer's neck-band. He jerked backward and lifted Dutch Gus out of the sucking sea. The girl stumbled to the stern of the boat as the bow went under and water cascaded over the seats. She stood erect and watched Fay.

Taking no chances, he laid the form over a gunwale and searched the pockets. He found a pasty mass of Bank of England notes and some gold. A knife, cartridges, papers and a notebook followed.

He deposited these on a seat and rose. He glanced over the sea. There was no sign of the other boats of the ship. Wreckage and floating crates lifted and fell with the waves. Fog swirled and wreathed about the spot where the freighter had gone down.

Stooping swiftly, Fay unbuttoned the German's clothes and removed a money-belt. There was a bulge near the buckle of this. The buckle was hard to open. Fay turned, steadied himself, and snatched up the knife. He opened a blade with his strong teeth. He slit the chamois of the belt and drew out the cipher-key. It was sealed. It had not been tampered with. The paper with which it was bound was wet.

"We win!" he exclaimed as he turned toward the girl in the stern of the boat. "He's checkmated!"

Her eyes flashed. She clutched the tossing gunwale with her fingers. She poised as he held up the package.

"Give it to me, Chester," she said. "I'll take care of it."

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He extended his arm and passed the package to her. "It may be worth the price," he said. "Guard it carefully."

He wheeled and stepped toward Dutch Gus. The German lay half in and half out of the water. His legs dragged through the waves. Fay rolled back the eye-lids and studied the pupils. He felt the pulse.

Turning then and searching the bottom of the boat, he saw a dry place where he could lay him. He lifted the body and staggered aft with it. He dropped it between the center and the stern-seat.

"Come forward," he said to the girl. "He isn't armed! We'll wait till he recovers his senses and then we'll make him row us ashore. It can't be more than six or seven miles."

Dutch Gus stirred at this statement. He threw up an arm and rolled over on his face. His hand crept toward his waist with sly, creeping jerks.

Fay smiled as the girl came to his side and sat down on the forward seat. "Watch," he whispered. "He's shamming! Watch, when he misses. the package."

A savage roar greeted the discovery of the loss. Dutch Gus doubled, turned, and lifted himself by grasping the starboard gunwale of the boat. He glared forward. His eyes were blood-shot and baleful. He saw the tiny revolver come up inch by inch until its muzzled pointed straight for his forehead.

"Row!" said Fay. "Take up those oars and go to work. I plucked you clean! You lost the gun you stole from me when the ship sunk. This one is a six-gun

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with steel bullets and smokeless-powder. It's little, but it'll do the work!"

The crook's eyes wavered. They searched the tossing sea, which was fog-shrouded. They returned to the sight of the little gun held so steadily. They dropped to the oars.

"That's right," said Fay. "Sit backwards and fall to. It's only seven miles, Dutch. Why did you pick such an awful coast?"

The German had no answer for this question. He staggered to his feet and stared about with savage eyes. Each time he turned toward the stern of the boat, he saw the little silver-plated revolver.

"Sit down!" said Fay. "Take up those oars! I'll give you 'till I count three. One!"

Dutch Gus dropped to the seat and picked up an oar. He outboarded this, then reached for the other. His broad back and sodden clothes blotted out the view astern. He swung his body and cursed as the oars missed the water. He dug the blades too deeply. He made poor progress.

Fay reached and pressed the cold muzzle of the gun against the German's purple neck where it showed above the collar.

"A little faster," said the cracksman. "Try it again. It's only six or seven miles."

The girl glanced now and then over her shoulder. The fog along the coast was heavier than any veil. Beneath this fog the sea lifted and dropped with a long-drawn moan.

An hour passed with the boat making slight head-

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way. Fay shifted the revolver to his left hand. They were caught in a current which was bearing them toward the coast faster than the German could ever row. An island showed through the fog. A ship blared a signal.

Saidee Isaacs rose, stood on the seat, balanced herself against Fay's shoulder, and called. She repeated the call. It was unanswered. An echo mocked them as a faint cry was thrown backward.

"Sit down!" commanded Fay. "It isn't far, now. See? That's land! That isn't fog. Over there!"

He pointed the gun toward where a murky mass of vapor was backed by a deeper shadow.

She glanced over the boat's side. The water was yellow — from mud.

"We're nearing shore," she said.

He stared at her. They both were buoyant with the thought of the cipher-key. It drove away sleep and weariness. Now and then she touched the hiding place and smiled at him.

Dutch Gus rested on his oars and breathed heavily. Fay clicked the cocking mechanism of the little revolver. The German did not turn. He bent forward swiftly and dragged backward. He repeated the motion. The fear of death had crept through his brain.

An island, mud-shored and barren, lifted out of the sea. It was no larger than the deck of a ship. Rocks showed where the high-tide had washed. There was a white line on these rocks.

"Starboard, a little," said Fay. "No, the other

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oar!" he snapped. "That's right. Make for the island. I'm going to maroon you there."

The German rose as the boat grounded. He turned and stared downward at the menace of the revolver. It was compelling. The steady finger through the trigger-guard, the eye that flashed over the sights, meant death, and quickly.

"Get over the bow and wade!"

Fay said no more. He crouched by lifting himself partly from the seat. He watched Dutch Gus leap from the boat and sink to his waist in mud and water. He turned the gun and handed it to Saidee Isaacs.

Taking the oars, he drove the light craft far off the shore and in the direction of the mainland. Each time he feathered the blades he saw the lone figure standing by the rocks. A clenched fist was raised to the overhanging pall of fog and sea vapor. A horrible curse rolled over the waters.

Fay turned away and glanced into Saidee Isaacs' olive face. She smiled with her eyes. She pointed over the bow. He nodded and bent his back. The boat reached an inlet between two high promontories. He guided it ashore and inboarded the oars with a jerk of his wrists.

She stepped out and seized the painter. Fay sprang over the seats and assisted her. They stood on a shelving beach which bore the marks of fisher-boats' keels.

"We'll go up there," he said, pointing to a path which wound around the sea end of the northern promontory.

She followed him. He turned now and then and

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assisted her to climb the rougher spots. They came to a shelf which was directly over the sea. They stood and gazed out toward the island whereon Dutch Gus was marooned. It was hidden by the sea mist.

"Let me see the package," he said, fastening his glance upon her. "Let's open it and find out what it is. Then, if it is ever lost we'll know how to solve the riddle of the dye-cipher. I'd rather have it in my head than where it can be stolen."

"Do you think we should open it?" she asked, thrusting her hand in her waist at the breast. "Don't you think we can wait?"

"No! We might get stopped yet, Saidee. We don't know where we are. This may be Denmark. The coast guards may search us."

She handed him the package. He glanced at the strings and the seals. They had been untouched. He studied the name blotted by the sea water into a running smear.

"It's all right," said he with satisfaction. "Dutch Gus never opened it — but I'm going to. You're my witness, Saidee. Here goes."

He drew the German's knife from his pocket and cut the strings. He ran the thin point of the blade under the seals. There were five of them joining the paper. He unwrapped the covering and held out an oblong box which was stamped with a small, "Made in Germany" mark.

Lifting the lid, he peered inside!

Her warm breath struck his cheek. Her gasp of surprise was followed by a disappointed cry. Her

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hands raised and clutched the soiled ruching at her throat. She stamped her foot.

Inside the box was a pair of smoked-glasses!

Fay lifted his white, drawn face and glared toward the sea. He swayed as he drew the box with its contents back and over his right shoulder. He flushed suddenly with the memory of the trip he had taken. Rage crimsoned his features.

"Sent me!" he exclaimed huskily. "They sent me through hell to get this trifle. You, Richard, and you, Keenon — are mad!"

The box and the glasses described a flashing arc through the air. They struck the sullen waves below the shelf of dark rock. They sank in many fathoms of brine. A winding shroud of opal vapor swirled and enclosed them in its clammy folds. It was like a pall to all his hopes!

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CHAPTER XII

SMOKED-GLASSES

SAIDEE ISAACS was the first to recover her voice and reason. She seized Fay's left arm and drew him away from the edge of the cliff. She feared that he might cast himself into the sea.

"You shouldn't have thrown them away," she said quickly. "Chester — you should have looked them over carefully. Perhaps —"

"I'm done! To think what a fool I've been. We've both been gulled. It is the end of a wild-goose chase — if ever there was one!"

She let go of his arm. Her face lifted to his. She saw his eyes flash out and over the sea. A bitter light was in their depths. Defiance flamed there. He squared his shoulders and dropped his hands to his sides.

"Come on!" he said. "Let's go inland and find out where we are. We can get a railroad train or something for the north. The country is full of refugees and broken soldiers. No one will notice us. We can go to Stavanger and then to the States."

She furrowed her brows and blocked his way by thrusting her body before him.

"We mustn't leave here yet!" she declared positively.

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"You've done something you shouldn't have done. Suppose the key was written on the wrapping paper of that package. Suppose the smoked-glasses were hollow — or something like that. We wouldn't expect the key to be right out in plain view. I wonder if there is any way to get them back?"

"Get them back? No! I never want to see them! I'm done — I say! They were ordinary glasses like beggars or blind men buy for a shilling. There was nothing on the wrapper or the box. The whole thing was a hoax — or an accident."

"Do you think that the embassy would put such a thing in the inner box of their strongest safe?"

"They didn't know what was in the package."

"But, Chester, they refused to give it up — either to Germany or to England. They knew it was important. They knew that the commercial war was on. The signing of peace had nothing to do with the dye secrets. They belong to the man who is strong enough and clever enough to get them. You got the key to the whole thing — then threw it away."

Fay stared back over the pathway. He hesitated, then turned toward the girl. Her eyes were dark and smoldering. She was very sure of herself. The fire within her had reddened her olive cheeks. Her lips had hardened.

"I despise you!" she said. "You're so thoughtless! You overlook the trifles of life. What are we going to say to Sir Richard?"

"Sir Richard will never find me. You can go back! I'm going to the States. I'm done, I tell you!"

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She realized that he was not to be moved from his declaration.

"How deep is the water where you threw the glasses?" she asked as he did not move from his position.

"Fifty or sixty feet, Saidee. There's an undertow and tides and waves. It's no use! Let's forget the smoked-glasses and go to Stavanger. We've got a right to live in this world. Has the Yard any strings on you?"

She did not answer him. Instead, she stepped to the edge of the cliff and glanced downward. She swayed, braced her foot and stood there in an attitude of thought. Finally she turned and came back to him.

Her hand clutched his left arm as she drew him toward the side rocks and a shelter from the wind. She spread her damp skirt and sat down upon a drift-wood plank which someone had carried up from the sea. She dropped her face in her hands. He watched her.

"Quit that!" he said with feeling. "What are you doing — crying?"

She glanced up swiftly. Her eyes were bright and free from tears. "I'm thinking, Chester," she said, "of a number of things. I'm not like other women — or girls. I can hate and I can despise. I almost hate you, now. Your friends are Sir Richard and MacKeenon. They helped me get you out of Dartmoor. You say they did it for a purpose. Granting that does not change matters. The purpose is a high one. You responded at first. You took their parole and went to Holland. Now, when you may have held the key

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to the dye cipher in your hand, you threw it away. You talk of going to Stavanger and to the States. Don't you realize the obligation you owe to me?"

Fay shook his head with emphasis. "I realize that the whole thing is up," he said feelingly. "I hate Scotland Yard, now! They sent me on a venture filled with dangers for me, and none for them. They took a chance that the package in the embassy's safe was the cipher-key. They didn't know any more about it than I did. It's proved! Do you think a clever German chemist would have a key hidden in a pair of smoked-glasses? He left them with the embassy for a gull. The true key, if there was one, died with him."

"Then Dutch Gus and the others were wrong?"

Fay raised his brows. "I hadn't thought of that," he said slowly. "It does look queer. But a pair of smoked-glasses don't answer the riddle."

"You shouldn't have thrown them into the sea."

"You don't think I was going to take anything like that back to Sir Richard, do you?"

She rose and stood before him. Her hands were straight down at her sides. Her upturned face was heated and burning. She flashed an inner signal which he did not understand.

"I despise you now," she said slowly. "You're clever and you're keen-brained and you're cool-headed, but you overlook the trifles. You have failed a dozen times on account of trifles. You can't see that little things have vast importance, sometimes. The smoked-glasses were a trifle. You threw them away before I

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knew what you were doing. Suppose they turn out to be the cipher-key."

Fay drew away from her a step. "Suppose they do," he said. "We can't ever get them back. Why not quit arguing in a circle and come down to facts? I want you to go to Stavanger with me. I need a pal, who is a sticker. We'll forget England and what happened there. I'll never say I was at Dartmoor. I can change my name and live the thing down. I want to get away from the memory of that cell and those guards and the sneaking servants of the law. I want the open places where I can see the stars."

She softened her glance perceptibly. He swept her slender form. Her skirt, her shoes, her waist and feather-dragging hat, were all sea-soaked and mist-flattened. Her eyes and the jewels on her fingers alone spoke the Saidee Isaacs of other days.

"Come on," he said, snatching up her hand. "There's a trail inland and a wide world to walk in. Let's find a hay-mow or barn and go to sleep. We'll feel better when we wake up. I'm sorry about the glasses, but I hated the thing from the beginning and now I know I was right."

She feared to temporize with him. He had one virtue which outweighed his faults. She knew in his heart there was loyalty. He had never been known to turn on a friend.

"I still hate you," she said. "I'll always hate you for what you did with the glasses. Perhaps we can get them. I want to remember this place."

Turning, she stared out over the shelf of rock and

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widened her eyes for landmarks. There was an island which loomed through the mist. There was an opposite point of dark crags. The inlet at her left hand would be marked on a good chart of that coast.

He went on up the pathway and waited for her. His coat was drawn over his body. His cap was pulled far down upon his head. He twisted a button with long white fingers which were slightly stained with oakum. It was the brand of Dartmoor.

"We'll go," he said as she stepped to his side, "over the ridge and down into the lowland. I'm dead for sleep. We better avoid the main roads until I get my senses. Dutch Gus or some of the others of his gang may have landed. They'll notify the Germans. Come on, Saidee, buck up, and don't look so doleful!"

She flushed and followed him. He helped her now and then over the rough places. They came to a cleft in the rock. Through this opening a vista was to be had of a sloping highland which disappeared within the gray mists which rose from a long, straight canal.

Fay pointed toward a windmill whose arms were still. A huge barn and hay-rick showed at the junction of two fences. Cattle grazed on the damp grass.

"We'll make that," he said, pointing toward the hay-mow. "I must have sleep— I'm hardly myself."

An Airedale, with an erect tail and a burr-clustered hide, came running up to them as they reached the fence. He sniffed at Fay's coat, then stared at the girl with a wise cant to his head.

"He'll stand watch," said the cracksman. "I'll bet he thinks we're refugees from Germany."

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She twisted her rings and glanced over the farm. There was nobody in sight. A pale feather of smoke rose from a chimney. Pans and churns stood outside the kitchen of a stone house. It was a picture of Holland comfort set in a winding mist.

Fay reached the hay-mow and pointed toward an opening. "Crawl in there," he said. "I'll find another suite. Wake me when you wake. I must have sleep."

She laughed almost hysterically. "With these rings?" she asked turning toward the farm-house. "Are we safe?"

"In Holland, yes," yawned Fay, covering his mouth with his right hand. "They don't lock the doors in this country — an old crook told me who ought to know. Good-night, Saidee!"

He stooped, patted the dog, then rounded the hay-mow. There was a second opening which had evidently been made by cattle feeding. There were marks of hoofs about it. Fay crawled within the hay, rolled over, covered his face with his arm and started reviewing the events of the day. He dozed with half-thoughts trooping through his brain. He woke, hours later, turned on his side, listened, then backed out from his cramped position. The mist had cleared. The stars were out. A light shone in the farm-house window. The dog was still on guard.

Fay rubbed his eyes and rounded the hay-mow.

Saidee Isaacs's shoes were all he saw at first. He seized a foot and shook it gently. She squirmed out to him, sat erect, then glanced back toward the opening.

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"Get my hat," she said. "I hope you're satisfied," she added hotly. "I didn't sleep a wink. I waited for you all afternoon."

"Like a good pal," he smiled.

"No — like a fool!"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Politics and crime," he said, "make strange companions. I'm feeling fit, now, and you're ready to fight. Let's go on to the nearest town, get some coffee and whatever else they have, then take the trail to Stavanger."

"You can go to Stavanger! I'm going to London — first train! I've a house there — a motor — and self-respect. If I follow you, I'll find myself in the — in another hay-mow."

He watched her attempts to pin her hat on her head. She jabbed the only remaining hat-pin through the crown at least a score of times. She tightened her lips as she stared at him.

"What are you laughing at?" she asked suddenly. "It isn't a bit funny. I'm supposed to have some self-respect. I think I've lost it all."

Fay crammed his hands deep within his pockets and bent his knees. He shook his head slightly. There was the thin ghost of a smile on his face.

"Oh, say now!" he said. "It's better to wake up in a pile of hay than in a stony cell. I thought I was back in Dartmoor till I smelled the clover."

She lowered her hands from her hat and stared at her rings. Her fingers strayed over her skirt and finished by a swift brush at the hem. She straightened and tried to return his smile.

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"I'm hungry!" she said savagely. "I'm hungry and I don't care who knows it. Let's go to that farm-house and knock. I'll kill you for this!"

Fay burst into an uproar of mirth. "Lady Isaacs, and look at you!" he retorted. "Suppose Sir Richard should see you now!"

She glanced at her shoes ruefully. She stamped one foot, then stared at the dog. Her eyes swung upward toward Fay's lips.

"I insist," she said, "that we go to that house and get something to eat. I must wash my hands and brush myself off."

"I'll go, Saidee. You stay right here. It wouldn't do for both of us to be seen at this time of night. I'll say I was wrecked on the coast. Then we can go on into some town."

Fay swung and started off toward the light in the farm-house. He was preceded by the Airedale, who barked once, leaped up the steps and scratched on the kitchen-door.

A broad-faced Hollander of the better sort peered out. To him, Fay offered two shillings for sandwiches. The man was joined by a woman who understood some English. She pressed back the shillings, took command, beckoned Fay inside the neatest kitchen he had ever seen, and there bustled about until a package of food was wrapped up and handed to him.

"Thanks," he said, thrusting it under his coat. "I'm a thousand times obliged. Now can you tell me the way to the railroad? The *chemin de fer?*"

"*Der Bahnhof?*" asked the burger in German.

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"Yes," said Fay. "By all means, yes!"

The man went to the door, and pointed toward a road which crossed the canal at a sharp angle. His finger steadied in an easterly direction. He glanced at Fay.

"I understand," said the cracksman, shifting the bundle of sandwiches under his arm. "That way? I'm much obliged! Thanks, good *frau*," he added gallantly. "I guess there's queer people knock on Holland doors these days — but none queerer than myself. Good-by!"

Fay hurried through the gloom. He turned once and saw the couple, who seemed to be childless, standing in the oval light of the open door. At their feet sat the dog, his intelligent head held sideways.

Saidee Isaacs was waiting behind the hay-mow. To her, Fay handed the package of sandwiches.

"I know the way to the railroad station," he said. "We'll eat as we walk. We can get something to drink in the canal or a brook. It's pot luck, Saidee, till we reach civilization."

They crossed the canal by a narrow bridge and descended to the eastern bank. A white road showed which struck inland through the mist. Barns and windmills loomed over the top of well-kept hedges. A wagon passed which was drawn by oxen. The sleepy driver turned and watched the unusual vision that had attracted him.

Suddenly Fay stopped and stared at the girl. A light shone ahead. A whistle had sounded. A roar was in the air of a train streaking through the night.

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"I think we can get a train north from there," Fay said, pointing toward the light. "We'll go to Delfzijl, at the mouth of the Ems, and from there we'll get a boat to Stavanger or some port in Norway."

She glanced back, then turned toward him.

"I'll get a train south," she said. "There is no use arguing. My mind is set!"

Fay smiled and hooked his right arm within the cove of her own. "You're coming with me, Saidee," he commanded. "You're coming for a good reason, too. That sleep did me a world of good. You were right about those glasses. I shouldn't have thrown them into the sea. There's something in them — after all."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that a woman's intuition was better than a man's judgment. I thought they were a trifle. Perhaps they were — but there's a big doubt."

"Don't talk in riddles. What have you discovered?"

He stared about the road and then pointed toward the light.

"We'll move fast," he said. "We must go to Stavanger and find if Ace-in-the-hole Harry — his right name is Harry Raymond — is there, or if he has taken a boat for the States."

She stared at him as if he had gone insane.

"I never heard of such a man or such a name. The idea of going to Stavanger to see an individual called *that!* Why, Chester!"

"That's right," he said, "jump at conclusions. Now you're wrong and I was wrong. Ace-in-the-hole

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Harry is the king of the deep-sea Greeks. He knows more about card manipulation than any man living. He is working the boats and the pigeons and the new flock of commercial travelers who have gold. He can rob a man at poker or at fan-tan. He can deal seconds or hold out three aces. I saw him in the smoking-room of the *Flushing*, coming over to Holland. From there he was going to Stavanger. I heard him say so."

"Do you think I would associate with him?"

"Yes — when I tell you he wore smoked-glasses exactly like the pair I threw away!"

She flushed and held herself back. She broke away from him and flashed an arch glance of query.

"What do you mean?" she asked. "What have his glasses got to do with the cipher-key?"

"That, I don't know. All I do know is, there's something rotten in Holland or Denmark when a man can do what he did with those glasses on. He knew every card. He trimmed a gull without half trying. There's a connection between the smoked-glasses and the cipher. I'm sure of that now. Will you go with me to Stavanger and help look up Harry Raymond? We can get in a game with him and try to find out how he does it. He's clever enough to think of most everything."

"You should have mentioned that before," she said, grasping his arm. "It is a clue, Chester. I'll go to Stavanger."

The road led through a patch of marshy ground, over a stile, across a rising lea-land, and then upon

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a railroad embankment which stretched north and south as straight as a ruler.

Fay studied the rails, then led the way toward the switch-points and an empty goods train which had been shunted from the main line. The tarpaulins of this train were dripping with moisture. The train crew had gone up the metals to the low, stone-built station. A green light gleamed from a signal-arm.

"Looks like a way station in Kansas," said Fay as he helped the girl climb to a high platform. "We ought to see a tin-star marshal standing round chewing on a straw."

A sleepy-eyed operator was in the office. He raised the tiny frosted window as Fay knocked with his knuckles on the glass. Two of a train crew stirred from the benches in the waiting-room. They sat erect and stared across the gloom.

"I want to go to Delfzijl," said Fay to the operator and clerk. "I think you pronounce it that way," he added keenly. "This lady and I must go!"

A guard lumbered across the room and spoke rapidly in Dutch to the operator. He turned to Fay.

"You'll get a train in one hour," he said in fair English. "The matter will be a simple one, sir. How came you in this part of Holland?"

"I might ask you the same question," said Fay good-naturedly. "You have the first American voice I've heard in some time."

"American, no! Alberta, yes," grinned the goods-train guard. "I spent three years in the Canadian wheat countries."

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Fay booked passage by passing through the tiny window enough British gold to take an entire first-class compartment. He went outside and pulled a low truck within the shelter of the platform. He waited until Saidee Isaacs had seated herself. Then he said:

"The game starts, Saidee! I hope we're on the right scent. I wonder what peculiar property is in the smoked-glasses Harry Raymond wears? They certainly help him win — at cards."

"A double glass or something hidden in the lenses," she suggested.

"Something hidden, yes!" said Fay. "Something hidden — go and find it," he quoted thoughtfully.

The goods-train crew, who were evidently awaiting the coming of the north-bound train, stirred finally. They came out yawning, glanced at the two wanderers on the truck, then crossed the tracks in the direction of their train which was headed by a squat, open-cab locomotive.

A cone of white fire burst through the fog. A rumble and a whistle echoed over the moorlands. The train came to a grinding pause as Fay grasped Saidee Isaacs by the arm and ran down the station platform in the direction of the single first-class carriage.

They stood on the running-board as the train started.

Fay jerked a door open and helped the girl inside. She sank back on shiny leather cushions and breathed a long sigh of relief. She was glancing at herself in a mirror when the guard came along for the tickets. Fay asked him concerning the boat which met the

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train. It would be there, the guard explained with many gestures, but it's first port of call was Christiansand instead of Stavanger.

Fay nodded his head. The guard closed the door. The trip, with Saidee Isaacs huddled into one corner of the compartment, her eyes closed and her hat down over her face, was made without accident. Now and then Fay peered out at the landscape. It was mostly lowland and dykes and the ever-prevailing windmills which seemed so characteristic of Holland.

Delfzijl was reached just before dawn, and this allowed ample time to connect with the boat. Fay purchased clean linen and gloves for the girl and himself. They went up the gangplank of the *Romsdal*— a North Sea and Skagerrack boat with impossible cuisine and soiled cabins.

Hurtled northward, the passage took all the day and the better portion of the following night. The few passengers were totally uninteresting. Fay spoke to all of them. He had difficulty in making himself understood. One, only, a commercial traveler out of England, named Fairhold, showed interest in the cracksman's questions.

He boxed the events since the signing of peace like a mariner going over the compass points. He showed the trend of affairs commercial. He dwelt, in his heavy, drawling voice, on traffic and trafficking — on the silent embargo against all things German — on the bitter needs of the North Countries in cotton and rubber and wool.

Fay led to the dye question and received a blank

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stare. The man, who proved to be from Nottingham, did not handle print-goods or calicos or hosiery. Not handling them, he knew nothing about them. He explained confidentially that he was interested solely in brass hair-pins and wire-goods. Fay saw no reason at all for keeping this a deep secret.

"That hair-pin drummer," he told Saidee Isaacs as he knocked on the door of her cabin and was admitted, "says there's a train to Stavanger which goes at daylight. He also declares that the big boats leave Arendal for the States. What shall we do? Perhaps we'll find Harry Raymond at Arendal instead of Stavanger."

"Can we try both?" she asked.

"I think so. We'll go to the nearest big port — Arendal. If he isn't there, we'll cross Norway during the day and try Stavanger. He had a cockney stall with him. I'd know either man in a million. Harry has a drawl like a music-hall performer. He's an American crook who apes the English. They always overdo it."

She showed him her hat after smiling faintly. The plumes had dried and were presentable. Her ruching was pressed and turned. Her shoes had been touched up with the corner of a towel and some polish supplied by the deck-steward.

He studied her hair — blue-black, coiled from right to left — before she placed her hat on her head. Her lashes matched her hair to the fraction-shade. Her olive eyes held the faint suggestion of the Oriental — particularly in their inscrutable droop.

"You look splendid!" he declared with admiration.

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"I'm glad you changed your mind about coming north. I think — candidly, we're going to find out something from Harry Raymond. He won't talk to me — or tell me anything — but he don't know you. You have a clever way that'll get through his guard. Perhaps he'll play Banker and Broker with you. It's an easy game to trim a gull with."

"Gull?" Her brows raised to polite arches of inquiry at the argot.

"I mean pigeon," he said, hardly making matters better. "He'll play you for one, if you act right and don't overact."

"You seem confident that we'll run across him."

"He only works the big ports and the fast boats. He's sure to be in Arendal or Stavanger. Or else he's on the ocean."

She rose from the bunk and switched out her light. "Let's go on deck," she said, pressing open the door and glancing out. There's the coast of Norway, over there — so the steward says. We'll soon be in port."

Fay leaned over the rail and studied the dark shadow toward which the ship was plunging. He wondered what fortune lay in the path he had chosen.

Events moved swiftly enough after the ship docked. Fay called a carriage and was driven rapidly to the railroad station, where he learned that a train would leave within ten minutes for Arendal.

Daylight, which came early, was breaking as the tiny locomotive puffed into the great Skagerrack Port where boats could be taken for a score of points — including the States.

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One huge ship was in sight. Its long row of deck lights had not been extinguished. Lighters were alongside loading coal and a general cargo. A few all-night passengers were standing near the taffrail.

"She leaves at sun-down," the station-master told Fay after he had inquired. "You can book passage on Nordland Street."

Fay turned toward the girl. "We'll ride around," he said, "and look over the hotel registers. I'd know our friend Harry's writing if I ever saw it. There'll be a Count or a Duke or an M.P. or a mere Lord in front of it. He never played a small game."

Their search, carried well into the afternoon, was almost without result. One clerk recalled seeing such a couple as Fay described — a tall Englishman with a monocle or smoked-glasses, and a cockney who wore as many buttons as a coster-monger.

The direction which they had taken from the hotel might have been to the railroad station or to the docks. Fay wasted time searching for a definite clue. It was only when the hoarse blare of the great siren on the ship announced its immediate departure that he acted on the last chance.

He grasped the girl's arm and hurried her to the booking-office of the steamship line where a surly clerk had refused to show him the passenger list of the *Drammen* — the one ship in port.

"Two tickets to Stavanger," he said. "I understand the *Drammen* puts in there." He turned his lapel and showed the silver greyhound.

The clerk tossed out two first-class tickets, then

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opened the safe for change of the Bank of England note Fay had pressed forward.

Ten minutes later they were being rowed out to the *Drammen*. The landing-stage was being drawn up as the boat rounded a towering stern and swung alongside the rusty plates. The stage dropped with a splash. Fay tossed the boatman some silver coins and assisted the girl up the steep climb. He passed through the rail and found a cabin-steward.

"Stavanger!" he said commandingly. "Two first-class cabins for that port. I don't know whether the booking-clerk gave me good cabins — but I want them!"

The girl followed the steward as the stage came up and the screw thrashed astern. Fay glided forward and glanced into the smoking-room. No one was there. There was no sign of Harry Raymond or his companion on the decks. He searched them all.

It was at the captain's table, during the dinner hour, that there appeared two figures which once seen could never be forgotten. Fay had taken the precaution to interpose a Norwegian traveler between himself and Saidee Isaacs.

He coughed and attracted her attention. She lifted a glass of water from the rack and glanced coolly over its edge. She, too, studied the two men who had taken designated seats at the purser's table.

Harry Raymond was resplendent in a Bond Street creation of shepherd plaid and a fancy vest. An insignia dangled from a ribbon across his waist. His eyes were hidden behind a great pair of smoked-glasses. His voice drawled across the dining saloon like a prime

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minister's or a cabinet member's. His companion was the horsey-looking cockney who had aided in trimming the Yorkshire squire on the *Flushing*.

Fay did not glance in their direction during the meal. He rose before Saidee Isaacs had finished eating. He passed to the deck and leaned over the rail at the after end of the boat-deck. Below him was the square block of a hatch crowned with a fan-shaped derrick-mast. Over this mast loomed the jack-staff with the Norwegian Merchant Flag flying.

Astern glowed the phosphor of a restless sea divided by the white wake of the ship. The dark coast of Norway showed like a cloud bank on the starboard beam. Fay turned and stared at this highland. Hours passed with him in the same position. Passengers strolled upon the deck. The stewards appeared with steamer chairs and heavy wraps. The twin funnels of the boat flared from the inner fires. The single screw jiggled and thrashed. The stars came out and torched the overhead velvet.

Suddenly quick footsteps glided to his side. Saidee Isaacs turned and glanced forward as she laid a hand on his wrist. She closed her fingers and clutched with hot strength.

"It's all right," she whispered without turning her head. "I flirted with him and found out any number of things. He and his companion are going to New York. This ship reaches Stravanger at sun-up. He's still wearing the smoked-glasses, Chester."

"How about a card game?"

"All fixed, Chester. He'll start one in a few minutes.

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He's invited me to join him at Bridge. My partner will be a stupid Russian with plenty of money. He's the one who sat next to the captain."

"Where do you play?"

"In the Ladies' Saloon. There's a port-hole just over where I'll insist that Harry Raymond sits. He's supposed to be the Right Honorable Frederick Lonsdale — this passage."

"I'll be at that port-hole," replied Fay.

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CHAPTER XIII

THE LONG ARM

SAIDEE ISAACS lifted her hand from Fay's arm, swung with the movement of the ship, then hurried forward toward the direction of the Ladies' Saloon where the game of Bridge was scheduled.

Fay watched her vanish in the glow of the deck-lights. He saw a door open and then close. A shaft of mellow fire struck out onto the rail and the crisscrossed waves. It vanished. The long deck was deserted.

The cracksman crammed his hands into the side pockets of his overcoat, fished out a cigarette and lighted it by the quick scratch of a match on his heel. His eyes were useless over the period of a minute. Gradually sight and clear vision came to him. He removed the cigarette and stared at its glowing end. He pasted it to his lower lip and started around to the port side of the ship.

Passengers were seated there to the number of a score or more. They were crouched in sheltered chairs or between the ventilators and the outswung boats. A regulation was still in effect regarding these. German mines, so profusely distributed during the period of the war, might be encountered at any moment. Many ships had been lost in the same waters.

Fay reached midship and the shelter of a ladder

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which led upward to the hurricane deck. He drew out his watch, held it sideways toward a luminous port-hole and stared at the dial. Saidee Isaacs had ample time to arrange the setting for the bridge game. It should be well in progress.

He moved slowly forward as if seeking shelter. He reached the first of the port-holes which marked the Ladies' Saloon. These were partly curtained with many-colored silks.

Glancing inside, Fay saw a group of passengers about an upright piano. A singer stood at one end of the piano. She held a sheet of music in her hand. Beyond her, and close up to the sheathing of the cabin, an alcove showed within which sat Saidee Isaacs, a stout Russian, the cockney stall and Harry Raymond, whose back was turned from Fay's view.

Fay glided to the nearest port-hole, leaned back, surveyed the deck, then tossed his cigarette away and gradually thrust his head toward the round disc of the port-glass.

The view inside held all the charm of eavesdropping. The warm colors of the Saloon, the tinkling notes of the piano, the woman's rather faded voice — that echoed within the surge and hiss of the sea — wove a spell.

Fay narrowed his eyes and studied the cards which were held in the sharper's hand. He glanced at the table and the exposed dummy. He mentally caught the fortunes of the game by the expression of rage on the face of the Russian and the soft, slow smile of Saidee Isaacs.

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The points were shilling ones and the stakes rather high. Harry Raymond had evidently doubled the shilling point on every occasion. He played into his partner's hand, took the lead and finished the round by collecting twelve out of thirteen tricks.

The Russian, who had dealt and lost, stared at the sharper with a savage bristling of his beard. Saidee glanced up and into Fay's eyes where they were glued to the glass of the port-hole. She made no sign save to rub her brow thoughtfully. Fay studied the sharper's back and the great bows of the glasses he wore. There was no chance to peer through the lenses.

The game went on with Harry Raymond and his partner winning as if the backs of the cards were open books to them.

Fay, himself, wondered at this exhibition of uncanny skill. He furrowed his brows and drew his head away from the port-hole. He went over all the things he had ever heard concerning card-manipulation. A vision came to him of a table at "Jimmy's," in London, and a conversation between two deep-sea card players. They had told of dealing seconds, and holding out, and even of buying up the entire stock of cards on a ship and supplying a purser with marked decks.

The sharpers had made no false moves. The cards had most certainly been well examined by Saidee Isaacs and the Russian. They were a popular back, extremely hard to mark. The trick, if trick there was, lay in the smoked-glasses worn by Harry Raymond!

Satisfied of this fact, Fay started around the deck in order to divert suspicion from himself. One or two

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passengers had passed him while he was peering through the port-hole.

He reached the great bay of the combined bridge and pilot-house. A fog was sweeping in from the sea. It lay over the plunging bow of the ship like a blanket at the foot of a bed. Toward this murky veil the course was being held.

A man, wrapped in a pea-jacket, came down a ladder swiftly, squinted at a yellow tissue, then started along the starboard side of the ship. Fay realized it was the captain, although the braid on his cap was inconspicuous.

He followed him until he reached a midship boat. He stood in the shelter of this and saw a steward come forward. The two men, dimly discerned under the yellow glow of the overhead deck-lights, were pointing toward a cabin door. Fay started with surprise. It was his own door!

The steward tried the brass-knob, rapped once, bent his head and listened with his left ear to the panel. He straightened and shook his head as the captain struck the tissue with impatient knuckles.

An oath in Norwegian rolled along the ship. Fay came out from the shadow of the boat and sauntered forward. He rounded the bay of the pilot-house and hurried aft without glancing back. He stood, finally, at the rail which overlooked the stern of the vessel.

His brain worked swiftly and toward one point. The captain had received a wireless message. The message concerned himself. For no other reason would the steward have knocked on the door of the cabin.

The context of this message might prove embar-

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rassing. Scotland Yard had a long arm. It had dragged him out of a Dartmoor cell. It had pressed him on in the mission to Holland. Now, perhaps, it was reaching again, and this time for revenge and deeper incarceration.

Fay smiled with thin bitterness. He was on the eve of a discovery. The captain might make an arrest at any moment. Visions of chains and "brigs" and well-guarded cabins came to him. He stared forward where he had last seen the captain.

The fog had been reached. It wreathed the ship in clammy folds. The spars, the rails, the outswung boats, the white life-preservers, were dripping with yellow drops. The siren blared its warning signal. The knife-like bow of the ship slit through the curtain like a sabre through cloth.

Hurtling onward, the ship seemed a shadow within a shadow. The hissing waves under the counter, the thrash of the single screw, the clank of shovels on the stoke-hold plates — heard through the ventilators — all drove a resolve within Fay's breast. He cursed the day he had ever heard of the cipher or the cipher-key. He wanted freedom and a shielding distance away from the menacing hand of the Yard. He decided to crawl into a life-boat, draw the tarpaulin, and remain there until he could signal to Saidee Isaacs. He reached upward and lifted himself to the blocks of the after port boat whose davits were swung outboard.

The stiff canvas was laced by stout rope-yarn. It would have to be cut in order to lift a flap sufficiently large enough to crawl through. He reached for his

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knife. He turned his head at a sound which was blown from forward. He sprang down and leaned over the rail in an attitude of deep contemplation of the sea and fog.

Saidee Isaacs glided to his side. She pressed her hat against his cap as she said tersely:

"I only got away from the game for a minute. I can't make it out. Here's a deck of the cards which we were using. Look them over, Chester. They seem all right. I have got to put the deck back or it will be missed."

"*His* glasses?" asked Fay. "What kind are they? I couldn't see from the port-hole."

"They're very thick and smoky." Saidee Isaacs glanced apprehensively forward. "They're thick, Chester. I can hardly see his eyes through them. He said that they had been weakened by a mustard-gas attack at Ypres."

Fay rapidly scanned the back of the cards, then turned them over and held them toward the light from a deck-bulb.

"He never was nearer Ypres than London or Calais," he said, shuffling the deck by a practiced motion. "He's an awful liar!"

The girl clutched his sleeve and narrowed her dark eyes. "Hurry!" she said. "Is there anything wrong with the cards? He's won three hundred pounds from that Russian. How does he do it?"

Fay bunched the cards and ran his fingers over their edges. He replaced them in the box and handed the box back to the girl.

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"I don't know," he said, glancing squarely at her. "There's nothing wrong with the cards — no edge-work, no marking on the back, no pin-pricks. The light's good here. I didn't see a thing wrong. It's in the glasses he wears."

She started away and toward the bow.

"Wait!"

She grasped the rail and turned. "What is it?" she asked. "I must hurry back. It was my dummy — that's why I came."

Fay reached in his pocket and whipped out a cigarette. He lighted it with cool fingers holding the match. He jerked his head toward the pilot-house and the fog-wreathed bow.

"The captain has a wireless message of some kind. He tried to find me in my cabin. The steward knocked. They're looking over the ship for me now. Something has gone wrong. They wouldn't do that unless there was a rumble."

"Rumble?"

"Yes! I'm discovered! The Yard has wirelessed the ship. We were trailed aboard — you and I."

"It can't be, Chester."

"It's true! There's no other reason for the skipper's looking for me. He'll probably lock me up if he finds me. I'm going to hide in this boat. You find out what you can about the smoked-glasses. I'll stay here till you come back."

She twisted the deck of cards in her fingers and narrowed her eyes. Her lips hardened slightly. Anxiety showed in the corners of her mouth.

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"Are you sure?" she asked.

"Certain! Get back to the game. Don't excite any suspicion. Find out what you can and keep me posted. We're pals! I'm not going to stand for a pinch — if I can help it. You can give out later that I jumped overboard. I'll leave some clothes on the deck. MacKeenon is not going to get me back to London. My one chance is to hide until you get the information concerning the glasses from Harry Raymond. Then we can breathe easier."

"Get into the boat," she whispered. "Stay there till I come. I did see the captain and a steward looking around the Ladies' Saloon."

"You better not go back then."

"Yes, I must; perhaps I'll discover the secret of glasses," said Saidee Isaacs.

Fay waited until she had vanished in the mist. He reached upward for a second time, grasped a block and sprang to the rail. He cut two strands of rope-yarn, unreaved it, and climbed within the outswung boat. He drew close the flap of canvas. There were a water-keg and a box of ship's biscuits, crammed among a full set of oars and paddles. He moved about and found a reclining place. He pillowed his head on a cross-seat which was as hard as the shelf he slept on in Dartmoor.

Time passed — perhaps thirty minutes. He had no mark of the hour. He puzzled his brain for some way out of the situation. There seemed none. The captain was most certainly searching for him. The stewards and deck-stewards had been notified.

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The wireless operator was undoubtedly in touch with the shore stations as well as with Great Britain.

The ship would touch at Stavanger for a brief period. It would be daylight or nearly so, unless the fog thickened. Fay saw scant chance of getting ashore. He had the silver greyhound, but this insignia might prove an identification mark instead of a passport.

The monotonous blare of the fog-horn, forward, and the occasional blast from the deep-throated siren held his nerves at the breaking strain. He was cramped, cold and bitter. Footsteps along the deck served to irritate him. He wanted to smoke and feared the consequences.

There came a tap of a thrown object upon the canvas boat-cover. He waited and heard a mellow voice reciting:

"Thy towers, they say, gleam fair —
Bombay across the deep, blue sea."

He lifted the canvas flap and peered out. Saidee Isaacs was leaning over the rail. She glanced upward and bobbed the feathers of her hat.

Fay climbed out of the boat and sprang down to her side.

"Well?" he asked incisively.

"He's in his cabin, now. The game broke up when the Russian turned over his last kopeck. He had some pearls, but your friend Harry didn't want them. I never saw such a game of Bridge in my life!"

Fay stared at her lips. A fine smile of retrospection

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was upon them. The droop to her eyes was inscrutable. She flushed suddenly and turned from the rail.

"You'll have to be careful," she said warningly. "The stewards are looking for someone. They've been everywhere. I saw a man standing in front of your door. He's waiting!"

Fay glanced up at the boat. "What about the smoked-glasses?" he asked.

"They're still smoked! I never saw his eyes. He's a deep one. I tried to talk to him after we left the saloon. He said 'Good-night, old dear,' and left me."

"But you found out something?"

"Not a thing, Chester. He simply knew every single card in the game. He saw right through them. He is the most terrible man on the ocean. I lost—"

"How much?" asked Fay as he waited for her to finish.

"I lost thirty-two or three pounds. The Russian bet on the side. That's how he happened to pull out the pearls."

"What cabin is Raymond in?"

"It's on this deck—about midships. The awful cockney is next door to him. What are you going to do?"

Fay gripped her arm. "I'm going to have it out with him," he said. "I'll stick him up and get the glasses. They have some property of revealing what ordinary eyes cannot see. How else could he read the backs of the cards? How else can the cipher be read?"

She bobbed her head and fastened upon him the fine scrutiny of a pal-in-arms. He studied her keenly

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and then glanced over her shoulder. The fog blotted out all view of the sea and stars. The ship was plunging on toward Stavanger. The deck, as far as he could see, was deserted. It glistened in a long lane of shining moisture.

Suddenly she asked:

"Did he wear smoked-glasses when you knew him in the old days?"

"No — his eyes were as good as mine, Saidee."

"How long ago was that?"

"Five — six years. I saw him on a Blue Funnel liner out of Southampton. He didn't wear glasses then."

"It's a new trick," she said. "It's uncanny."

"Are they the same kind of lenses as were in the pair I threw into the sea? The same bows and color?"

"The glass is the same — almost opaque! I didn't get a very good look at the ones you tossed away."

"They were almost black. I guess they are the same. We'll have to get his pair if we want to appease Sir Richard and the Yard. I'll get into his cabin and have it out with him. Perhaps he'll tell me the secret. If he don't —"

Fay paused and closed his lips in a straight line. His eyes swung forward and away from the girl. His hand dropped to his pocket. It came out with the tiny revolver nestled in his palm.

"If he don't," he continued, "I'll use this gun. I think he's yellow when it comes to a scare."

"The cabin door may be locked."

"You go and knock. Tell him who it is. I'll break

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in as soon as he opens the door. You can stand guard while I get the glasses. Afterwards doesn't matter. It's now or never, Saidee! My freedom may depend on getting those glasses. Something is going to happen on this ship. They're looking very sharply for me, and you know what that means."

"Dartmoor?"

"Yes! Sir Richard and his jackals have picked up the trail. They could hardly miss it. We were careless at Arendal. We booked passage on this ship, after showing the silver greyhound. Any clerk would remember this." Fay fingered the insignia on his left lapel. "There's not many like it," he added.

"Take it off."

"No, I'll stick to it. It may serve, yet."

She glanced forward along the deck. Turning toward him, she said:

"I have a few of the cards with me. The Russian tore up a deck in his rage at losing. I'll lead the way to the cabin. When I cough — you come."

He followed her forward with his hand gripped upon the butt of the little silver-plated revolver. The cabins occupied by Harry Raymond and his cockney tool were upon the deck below the boat deck. Saidee Isaacs turned at a ladder, grasped the hand-rail, and went down backwards — like a good sailor.

The deck they both reached was misted and deserted. Four bells had struck, forward. The lights were out in the saloons. The lookouts and watch on deck were crouched in the shelter of the ventilators and boats.

Saidee glided swiftly over the planks, stared at a

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number upon a cabin-door, then stepped to the next. She knocked with light tapping. She repeated the signal. She bent her head and listened. Fay braced himself behind a ladder and waited. He saw her straighten suddenly. The cabin door was slid open. A man, in pajamas and slippers, thrust his head out and stared at her.

"Get them up!" said Fay, springing toward the door. "All the way up, Harry, alias Ace-in-the-hole, alias some other things. I want to see you! Look out, Saidee."

Fay was the master of the hour. He took no chances. The tiny revolver was thrust up and under the sharper's chin. The level eyes of the cracksman snapped dangerously. Blue light seemed to leap from their depths."

"What to hell?" stuttered the cardsharper. "What does this mean?" he added, forgetting his English drawl.

"It means, come clean!"

"Clean of what?"

"Those glasses you are wearing!" Fay pressed his left hand against the pink expanse of the sharper's shoulder and shoved him back into the cabin.

"Stand watch!" he said to Saidee Isaacs. "Let me know if anybody shows up on the deck."

He sprang inside the cabin and towered over the swindler, who had fallen back to the bunk in a shivering protest. Fay darted a glance about the cabin. It was simple enough. A wash-stand was built in the corner. There was a long, flat trunk under the bunk. Clothes and a cap hung on the back of a half-stool, half-chair.

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"Where's the smoked-glasses?" asked Fay. "Where did you plant them? I want them in three seconds, Harry. One!"

The sharper moistened his lips and glanced out through the cabin door. The girl stood there in an attitude of listening. Her face was turned forward and over the port quarter. Her eyes glowed with supressed fire. A shout had sounded from the pilot-house. The wheel had been swung as much as three degrees. The ship had reeled and then darted on through the folds of the sea fog.

Fay warily turned and stared at the girl. He stepped toward the door. A shot, muffled and far to the southward, boomed through the night. It was repeated with sullen tones. The ship was signaled to stop!

A door opened next to the cabin occupied by Harry Raymond. The cockney thrust out a long nose and a curious pair of eyes. He stared first out and over the ship's rail. He turned his head and blinked at Saidee Isaacs. He saw Fay's alert form in the doorway. Recognizing him, he ducked back into his own cabin and drew shut the door.

"A fine pal," said the cracksman, brandishing the revolver. "You picked a nice one, Harry. Come clean with the glasses or I'll count two and then three."

"I haven't got them," stuttered the sharper. "Honest to God, Fay, they're in the other cabin. Old Vic has them. I let him keep them after a game. Y' never can tell how people will squeak."

Fay shot a keen glance at the man's face. It was

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the color of dough — and blue-veined. Fear and weakness had loosened his lips. His teeth showed under a tawny mustache. His hands clutched the edge of the bunk. His knees knocked together.

"You're lying!" snapped Fay.

"I'm not, pal. I wouldn't lie to you. Cocky has the glasses."

"What's the trick? How do you read the cards with them?"

The sharper hesitated. He was on the point of speaking when a third shot echoed through the fog. A solid projectile screeched over the white boats on the hurricane-deck of the ship. A shudder passed from stem to stern. The great vessel had reversed its propeller. Saidee leaned aft and Fay was thrown against the side of the cabin. Shouting and the hoarse orders of the mates resounded. The fog was ripped in one place to port. Through the gap the fine prow and the belching funnels of a British destroyer of the super-class leaped. She bore down and rounded the ship's bow like a skater on ice. Four flags were flung to her bridge signal-halliards. A callow lieutenant-commander in oil-skins and a sou'wester held a battered speaking-trumpet to his beardless lips. Beside him stood a man in a plaid overcoat and cap.

The ship came to a stop with a popping of safety-valves and steam pluming from the pipe aft her funnel. The captain leaned from the ledge of the wheel-house, grasped a stay, and shouted to the lieutenant who had skillfully maneuvered the destroyer to a point on the port waist after rounding the ship's stern.

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"What do you want?" rolled over the waves.

The lieutenant lowered his speaking-trumpet and turned to the man in the plaid overcoat. They both were bathed in the yellow light which streamed from the actinic fog-projector mounted on top of the pilot-house of the ship.

The commander of the destroyer turned, wiped the dripping end of his trumpet with a bare palm, and shouted:

"We want two of your passengers. You got our wireless? We had hell — finding you. You know the two?"

"The woman is here!" hoarsely boomed the captain. "We can't find the man, yet."

The lieutenant turned to the figure at his side. They both dipped and rose with the movement of the destroyer. The crew were on deck. Faces appeared at the head of the engine-room companion. Two forms crouched at the seven-inch bow gun.

"I'm coming aboard!" shouted the commander. "Hold your headway — no more! Give her quarter speed! We'll see about that fellow!"

Saidee Isaacs grasped Fay's sleeve. "Get into the boat," she said, pointing toward the ladder which led to the upper deck. "Hurry, Chester!"

Fay pocketed the revolver, shot a final glance at the mute figure of the sharper in the cabin, then he leaped for the ladder. Up this he went until he had reached the upper-deck. He started aft, keeping in the shelter of the boats and ventilators. He stopped and drew himself into a narrow alleyway.

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Three seamen were casting off a bo'swain's ladder. They turned and stared forward as the mate and the captain loomed through the gloom.

A spot-light from the destroyer swung over the ship's upper rails and brought out every detail.

"Here he is," said the first officer. "Yes, this is the man we want."

Fay bowed as he stepped from the alley-way. "What do you want with me?" he asked.

The captain pointed toward the destroyer with a steady finger.

"They want you," he said heavily. "England wants you for some reason. The war is over, but England rules *this* sea. I've got to give you up — young fellow."

"It's an outrage!" said Fay. "This is a Norwegian ship. I claim the protection of your flag."

The captain motioned for the crew to lower the bo'swain's ladder. "The lieutenant-commander will be aboard presently," he said. "You can talk to him. You're a King's messenger, aren't you?"

Fay showed the silver greyhound by turning back the flap of his overcoat.

"Who is the lady?" asked the captain, fishing in the side-pocket of his pea-jacket and bringing forth a yellow wireless tissue. "This says a woman and a man who wears the insignia of the King's couriers. She's the one in the hat with purple feathers — isn't she?"

"You'll have to ask her," said Fay, loyally. "I claim your full protection!"

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The captain replaced the tissue and leaned upon the rail. A small-boat, which had been nested with others on the gray flush-deck of the destroyer, was dancing over the waves. In the stern of this boat the lieutenant and the man in the plaid overcoat sat. Two seamen bent to the oars. The boat reached the ladder. It lifted and fell. It steadied as the commander leaped the distance and grasped the lower end of the ladder. The silent man followed him nimbly enough. They came over the rail.

Fay moved forward and stared into the man's face. He recognized MacKeenon.

"Weil," said the inspector, "this is a deep pleasure. Ye should o' expected me about this time. Why, mon, the trail ye left was a verra broad one! A hae no doot ye thought ye were clever."

Fay gulped and glanced at the lieutenant-commander. "By what right," he asked, "does this man take me from this ship? I'm an American!"

"Five years in Dartmoor," said MacKeenon dryly. "A' hae no doot it'll be that many more. Did ye get what ye went after?"

The question was shot through thin lips. The pouches on the sides of the inspector's jaw distended and contracted. He bared his gums like a wise old hound. His eyes narrowed to slits.

"Did ye get it?" he repeated as his arm shot out and clutched the cracksman's shoulder.

Fay jerked away and turned. Some of the passengers had come forward and were curiously staring at him. Others peered out from the open doors of

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staterooms. A bo'swain stood near by, with a long belaying-pin. He toyed with this weapon suggestively.

"I got it!" said Fay, turning back to MacKeenon. "Oh, yes, I got it! I got what you sent me for. You know I got it!"

"So does the police of that city — south and east of here. Why mon, ye made a terrible job of it. A could have done better myself. A was surprised, after what I expected of you. Fortunately A had that stick o' mine handy, or else they'd of caught ye red-handed."

Fay smiled with engaging warmth. "Thanks for that," he said. "It was a good turn, but it deserved a better. What reason have I to leave this ship? Suppose I open my mouth and tell what I know."

"Ye'll never do that!" snapped MacKeenon cautiously. "Ye'll never squeal — A know that to be a fact. Come on now, Chester, with me. Get your luggage and come on. You're under arrest!"

The inspector threw back his coat and showed the gold insignia of Scotland Yard. He dropped his coat lapel and pointed a steady finger toward the destroyer whose deck was directly beneath the great ship's rail.

"Come on, mon!" he ordered.

"He'll not go!"

MacKeenon turned and stared forward. Saidee Isaacs had thrust herself through the curious passengers. She glided to Fay's side and repeated her declaration:

"He'll not go!"

"What — twa o' them," MacKeenon said softly.

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"Twa suspects on one boat. Captain, A hae the honor of arresting them both. The lieutenant will show his authority from the Admiralty. It was signed only yesterday. A weary stretch of ocean we have come over. It was only by chance we held your course in the fog. A was on the point of requesting the officer to proceed to Stavanger."

The captain saw no way out of the difficulty. He turned to Fay and said with salty vigor:

"Get your luggage and do as they request. I'll report the matter to my government. England is mistress of these seas by the terms of the peace treaties. I can't hold my boat any longer."

"You're a coward!" said Saidee Isaacs, stamping her foot on the deck. "This man has done nothing."

"Weil! Weil!" MacKeenon chuckled. "Miss Isaacs has changed a wee bit since last A saw her. She was willing to help trap a cracksman and now she's rounded on the Yard. A'y'l attend to her!"

The girl turned swiftly to Fay. "We have no luggage," she said. "We'll go! But never a word will we say. Remember, Chester, I will say nothing without you being present. Remember that!"

"A verra clever remark," intonated MacKeenon. "Twa thieves are far worse than one."

Fay followed the girl to the rail where the bo'swain's ladder was lashed. He assisted her to climb down until he was forced to let go her hands. Her upturned face was close to his as he leaned over the rail. Her eyes were loyal and smouldering with rage toward MacKeenon. Her cheeks flushed through the

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olive-hue of her skin. Her lips were set and almost hard. She flashed a sudden smile, and, turning her head, glanced downward to where the seamen of the destroyer had maneuvered the small-boat. They grappled the ladder with a boat-hook. She waited and sprang outward. She landed in the stern and grasped the gunwale. She stared upward with concern as Fay descended the swaying ladder.

He reached her side and waited. MacKeenon and the lieutenant-commander came down the ladder and leaped for the bow of the boat. It was shoved away from the rusty sheer of the giant ship. A bell clanged as the captain hurried forward along the upper rail. The screw thrashed the waves. The ship surged on. Its stern showed with gold letters marking the name: "*Drammen of Stavanger.*"

It was gone in a swelter of foam and funnel smoke. The fog closed about the last of the deck lights. The sea tossed the small-boat like a cork in a whirlpool.

"Steady her!" said the lieutenant-commander, smartly. "Hold steady! Out boat-hook! Catch that chain!"

The destroyer glided through the fog like a lean serpent. A white bone was at its prow. A bell jingled. An order rolled over the sea. The three screws reversed as the seaman reached upward and caught a dangling anchor chain. The boat was drawn close to the flush-deck. It was worked aft until a low ladder was reached.

"After you!" said MacKeenon through cupped hands as he raised himself in the bow and turned

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toward Saidee Isaacs and Fay. "Climb aboard! Ye'll be verra welcome!"

The girl was assisted up the ladder by the strong arm of an ensign who wore a gold-braided cap and greasy dungarees. Fay followed her. They stood clutching the hand-rail which rose from well-scoured duck-boards on the starboard waist.

"Remember, Chester," said Saidee Isaacs as MacKeenon scrambled out of the small-boat. "Remember, we'll say nothing until we see Sir Richard. He's more of a man than MacKeenon."

They're all the same," said Fay, bitterly.

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CHAPTER XIV

THE HOUSE OF THE LIONS

HOWEVER much Fay had expected the brig and irons, he was mistaken in both surmises.

The lieutenant-commander of the destroyer and MacKeenon were openly solicitous regarding their captive's welfare. The cabin assigned to Saidee Isaacs was just off the ward-room. It had been used by an Admiral during the years of the war. It was fitted with the simple, serviceable things which are found on all his Majesty's better ships — running hot and cold water in bath and wash-stand — a bed instead of a bunk — white walls and cork-tiled deck.

Fay was shown an ensign's cabin which had recently been vacated. He turned as he felt the powerful throbbing of the giant engines of the destroyer. MacKeenon stood in the doorway with his legs braced across the alley-way. The Scotch detective smiled dryly and regarded the pockets of Fay's overcoat with concern.

"A hae no doot," he said, "that ye are armed. Mind passing over any wicked thing in that direction? There's much powder about."

Fay dipped his right hand into his pocket and passed to MacKeenon the little silver-plated revolver which Saidee Isaacs had given to him. The inspector snapped

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it open and dropped the cartridges into the palm of his right hand. "A better keep these," he suggested. "Any more, Chester?"

"Nothing," said Fay.

"Now the package ye got from the embassy's safe." The request was almost cheerful as if the inspector expected no trouble at all in this connection. Fay stared at him and shook his head.

"I have no package," he said.

"What, mon — no packet! Ye made considerable mess of the safe in Holland. A hear from reliable sources that ye took the outer door, the day door and the inner box like a blacksmith."

Fay removed his overcoat, tossed his cap on the bunk, then stepped toward MacKeenon.

"You can search me," he offered. "I didn't bungle that job — as you think. I'm not going to talk with you until I see Sir Richard. I may be misquoted. You well know that anything I say may be used against me."

MacKeenon straightened himself, waited until the leaping destroyer had taken the downswing of a long glide, then he tapped Fay's pockets with professional concern. He finished with the overcoat and the cap. His lips wore a puzzled expression as he stepped back through the door.

"Ye gave the package to the girl?" he asked.

"See her! I'll not talk and I don't think she will. I got what I was sent after!".

"Ye got it! Where is it?"

"In London — where Sir Richard is — I shall

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explain everything. Up to that time and place, questions are useless, Mac."

The inspector sniffed and ran his keen eyes over the cabin. He turned and glanced up the alley-way.

"Come on deck when ye want to," he said softly. "Ye'll find oil-skins and boots in the ward-room. We're slithering toward the North o' England at a tremendous rate. We'll be there, this time tomorrow. A'y'll give ye that long to think things over."

Fay watched him disappear toward the bow of the destroyer. He sat down and lowered his face in his hands. The noises of their swift passage drove out all thoughts of escape. There were many alert men on the boat. Discipline was stern and thorough. The trap had been well sprung. It was the first stage of the journey back to Dartmoor.

He reviewed the series of events. It seemed that he had been gripped by a relentless urging since the hour MacKeenon had stood in that stone-lined courtyard at Dartmoor. There flashed over his brain the swirl and surge of affairs. He thought of every little detail — the cipher papers — the coming of Dutch Gus — the package in the embassy's safe — the smoked-glasses.

But one phase of the matter was illuminating. The others were blurred and destroying. Saidee Isaacs had cleared herself in a satisfactory manner. She was shown up in loyal colors. He no longer had any doubt of her.

He rose, thrust his arms in the sleeves of his coat, and pulled his cap down over his head. He glanced

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into a tiny mirror. His beard on chin and upper lip showed prominently. He had not shaved for days. There was a fighting light in his eyes, however, which had always been with him.

"I'm not beat!" he declared as he passed out the cabin and into a narrow, steel-lined alley-way. "I'll find Saidee and talk things over."

The alley-way terminated at a ladder which led to the deck. Flanking this ladder, to port and starboard, were two closed doors. Fay went up and lifted a hatch. He staggered to the duck-boards and gripped an iron railing. He glanced about with his eyes widening at the wilderness of water and fog and spindrift.

The super-destroyer was knifing westward like a hurtled javelin. Her four funnels belched fire and oily smoke. Her superstructure of nested boats, ventilators, pilot-house, chart-house, battened guns and two taper signal-masts vibrated and throbbed under the steady hammering of the high-speed engines.

The dawn was breaking to the eastward. A yellow light was on the fog. A sea bird wheeled and fell astern. A great wave curled the sharp bow, combed the flush decks and seethed to leeward.

Fay wound his fingers about the rail and turned until he faced the after part of the destroyer. A few of the crew were on deck. They crouched in the lee of shelters. The stern gun had a jaunty tilt to its long muzzle. A mark showed on the sponson where a German shell had exploded.

Saidee Isaacs appeared in oil-skins and a yellow

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southwester. She was followed by the lean form of MacKeenon. They worked forward and stood by Fay's side. They swayed with the movements of the fast-flying destroyer.

"Yon is Scotland," said MacKeenon. "Ye are in the heart of the North Sea."

"Where do we land?" asked Fay.

"The Firth o' Tay — at Dundee or Perth."

Saidee Isaacs pulled down the brim of her southwester and stared forward. She pressed her fingers against Fay's arm.

"We'll be in London by tomorrow afternoon," she said warningly.

Fay nodded. He was helpless. There was no possible escape from facing Sir Richard.

"A have sent a wireless," said MacKeenon between gusts of wind. "They will be expecting distinguished guests," he added dryly. "A warn ye both that if ye have the cipher-key or know where it can be gotten — don't destroy it or cause it to be whisked away. It is also the key to Dartmoor."

"Then I'm gone," thought Fay as he glanced at the girl. She shook her head slightly. Her fingers uncoiled from the rail. Her hand passed slowly over her mouth. She had indicated silence without MacKeenon catching the motion.

Fay dropped his eyes and glanced at the hatch. "Let's go below," he said. "I'm getting wet and cold up here. How about some breakfast, Mac?"

"Ye shall both be served," said the Scot. "A shall breakfast with ye both."

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The morning passed in the silence of the ward-room. Afternoon deepened the light that came through the port-holes. Green changed to opal, and opal to gray. Fog swirled and wound the destroyer with a protecting cloak. The speed was not reduced until the old mine barrier was reached off the Scotch coast. A shot gave the warning. Voices called from ship to ship. Once the bright flare of a two-second light flashed and was gone. They entered the Firth of Tay and glided for the anchorage off Dundee.

"A quick passage," was all that MacKeenon said as the rattle of the anchor chain followed the shutting down of the engines.

Fay waited in the ward-room as Saidee Isaacs went for her hat and gloves. She returned within a minute. She stood erect and faced the Scot as two ensigns came down through the companion and saluted.

"Ye go with us," said the inspector. "There shall be a mon or twa waiting in Dundee. Passage has been booked for the south. A think it will be long after midnight when we board the Royal Scotsman for London. A hae no doot ye'll thank the commander for me."

The ensigns stared at the girl admiringly. They saluted and started up the ladder which led to the deck. Fay preceded Saidee Isaacs. MacKeenon waited discreetly, then climbed rapidly upward. The group stood on the dark deck of the destroyer. Lights showed where ships rode at anchor. A diadem of fire rimmed the quays and water front. A hotel added its glow over the city's house-tops. All this was a glimpse

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of England to Fay. He turned as he heard a metallic sound. MacKeenon had opened a pair of handcuffs. They clicked softly upon the cracksman's protesting right wrist.

"A can take no chances," apologized the vigilant inspector.

Saidee Isaacs started. She wheeled with flaming cheeks and glowing eyes toward the inspector.

"Take them off!" she exclaimed hotly. "What do you mean?"

MacKeenon carefully gripped the loose end of the cuffs and felt to see if Fay's wrist was clamped tight enough.

"A have my orders," he said craftily.

"From whom?" The girl's voice was tense and demanding.

"From the Yard. A can do nothing else than what A've done. In the train A'y'll take them off. A shall take them off."

"Never mind," said Fay slowly. "He's got some kind of a warrant. I'm on parole — you know."

MacKeenon chuckled and snapped his eyes. "Ye are that," he said, "and here comes the boat. Step this way, Chester."

A whale-boat rowed by two sailors glided alongside the flush-deck of the destroyer. The seamen upended oars and reached for a grating. They waited.

MacKeenon, with Fay in tow, led the way over the duck-boards and down a flat ladder to the boat. He stepped aft and made room on the stern seat for the cracksman. Saidee Isaacs sprang aboard and glided to the bow. The two ensigns stood at attention.

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They saluted as the sailors shoved off and started rowing.

The shore was reached at a Government quay, piled high with North Sea stores. An auto was standing at the head of the quay. The driver blew three blasts on his horn. MacKeenon answered the signal by raising his hand. A man came gliding between the boxes and bales and stared at Fay. He turned toward MacKeenon.

"A've booked a compartment on the Royal Scotsman," he said like an inferior to a superior. "Ye should reach London by noon. Sir Richard has wired me he will be waiting at the House of the Two Lions."

"Scotland Yard," whispered Saidee Isaacs into Fay's ear.

MacKeenon caught the sly aside and smiled like a crafty manhunter.

"A hae no doot it is," he said, staring at Saidee Isaacs. "It's a quiet branch of the Criminal Investigation Division."

The inspector led the way to the waiting motor. The drive to the station was made in silence. A wait ensued as the Dundee detective went within the train-shed and arranged for the compartment. He came back rubbing his dry hands. He nodded toward MacKeenon.

"Ye go through a side door," he said. "A'y'll follow ye — to see that ye get there. A had a slip-up in this spot once. My mon got clean away."

The Scot glanced at Fay with a glitter in his eyes. The cracksman shivered slightly. He could not help

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the movement. There was that to the inspector's which spoke of blood-hunting instincts bred in their bones.

"They're all the same," he whispered to Saidee Isaacs. "I told you they were all the same."

She signaled caution and followed him through to the train-shed. MacKeenon spoke to the guard. The compartment was unlocked. They entered and sat down.

The Dundee detective stood on the running-board with his watch in hand and his eyes glued upon the station-master, who wore more medals than a German field marshal of Hohenzollern days.

"Ye're off," he announced, snapping shut his watch. "A wish ye all a pleasant trip."

The train pulled out of the long station and struck across the city. It plunged into a covered bridge and out upon highland. It took the switches and shunts like a scared cat on a fence. It tunneled the fog and the night — south-bound for Edinburgh and London.

MacKeenon reached and tried both doors of the compartment. He turned, fished into his vest pocket, and brought forth a tiny key.

"A'y'll take off the darbies, now," he said, slipping the key into the barrel lock of the handcuffs. "Ye can rest easier."

"It *is* about time!" declared Saidee Isaacs as she pressed herself into a corner of the leather cushions and pulled her hat down over her eyes.

Fay examined his wrist with concern. A red band showed there. He worked his fingers, stared at them,

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then brought forth a cigarette from his pocket and, declining the light offered by MacKeenon, struck his own match upon the bottom of his heel.

Dawn crimsoned the drawn shades of the compartment. The guard appeared at a station and took the inspector's orders for a basket of rather frugal proportions. The three ate breakfast in silence. The last scrap was finished by MacKeenon, who remarked dryly:

"Three and six! A minds the time when it was two and four."

Fay took this statement to mean that the inspector had spent rather more money than he expected for the breakfast. He watched the thrifty Scot make an entry in a note-book. His eyes wandered from this to Saidee Isaacs. She had pressed her face to a window and was peering out. She turned and held the shade up for him.

He caught a streaky glimpse of English meadows and estates. The trees were very green. The lawns sloped down to the rails like great seas of velvet. Hedges and well-trimmed clumps and flower-crescents flickered by.

Fay flashed her a quick signal. He could escape! MacKeenon might be bowled over. The door could be broken open. There was all of the North Country to hide in. A flying leap from the train would take him from the grasping hand of the Yard. The girl shook her head. She had a plan which she could not reveal to him. She steadied her eyes and smiled a slow, enigmatic smile of caution now, but freedom later.

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MacKeenon glanced at his watch. It was evident that the train would be late. This was such an unusual thing for the Royal Scotsman that he made inquiry of the guard as the great station at Peterborough was reached.

The guard explained the matter by mentioning troop movements back from France. The policing of Germany consisted of a mere handful of the former force.

It was graying dusk when the inspector rose and brought out the handcuffs. Saidee Isaacs turned from the window and flashed a protest as Fay's wrist was nipped and gyved to MacKeenon's left hand.

She held her tongue and stood erect. The train glided through the murk of a London station-yard. Switch-point lights flashed — green and white. A roar sounded of hollow sheds. A grinding of brakes announced the last stop. The guard appeared, drew out a great bunch of keys and unlocked the door. He thrust his head inside.

"Hall hout!" he said. "They're waiting for you, inspector."

Fay, on the end of a bright steel chain, followed the detective. Saidee Isaacs, who might have dropped back, stepped up loyally. The three hurried through a curious crowd and glided out of a side door.

The same black car, with its H.M.S. plates, that had brought Fay to London from Dartmoor, was waiting. The same driver sat in the front seat. In the rear, holding an inviting door, stood the little old man who had followed the cracksman to Holland. His bundle

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lay on the seat. It was the nipper grip of the Yard — and perfect team-work!

The ride south and then west through the crowded throng of City clerks and busses was made in utter silence. MacKeenon sat between Fay and the girl. The little old man, whose eyes were as bright as a terrier's, watched everything. The pouches on the sides of his jaw were leathern and long. He sniffed at times. More times, he coughed with a distressing rasp like a growl or a low bark.

The car turned into the street upon which was the House of the Two Lions. The brakes went on with a clamp. The throttle was slowed as the driver lifted his foot from the pedal. He sprang out to the curb. A smell of hot oil permeated the night air. A double glow from two lamps illuminated the front of the house. A man stood waiting!

Sir Richard nodded his head to MacKeenon after the inspector had hurried Fay across the pavement and up the flight of steps. The chief of the bureau glanced keenly at Saidee Isaacs. He said nothing. His manner was cold. His great jaw snapped shut. It was like a double trap to Fay.

The light in the hallway was barely sufficient to reveal a flight of stairs leading upward and a closed door at the end. Toward this door Sir Richard stepped, threw it open, and bowed as MacKeenon led his suspect into the center of the huge room, where first Fay had seen the cipher sheets.

The cracksman studied this room as MacKeenon, at a nod from Sir Richard, rattled out the hand-cuff

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key and turned the bolt in the snap-lock. There were the same three tin boxes upon the long mahogany table. There was also evidence everywhere that clerks had been copying the cipher. Five American typewriters stood on tables at one end of the room. The lights in the overhead cluster were brilliant. The air tasted of pipe-smoke.

Saidee Isaacs stood by the door which led to the hallway. The little old man crept to her side and waited for Sir Richard to speak. Fay leaned against the corner of the long table and rubbed his wrist.

"You double-crossed me!" he exclaimed bitterly. "You said I could go to Holland scot-free, and you've had every Scotch inspector in the Yard after me. How do you expect to get results if you do that?"

"Yes — how does he expect it?" said Saidee Isaacs.

Sir Richard stared from the girl to Fay. He brought his lower lip over his upper one. His eyes were curtained by his furrowed brows. His right-hand fingers toyed with a watch-charm which hung from a heavy gold chain.

Turning suddenly, he moved a chair behind the table, sat down, leaned back, thrust his thumbs in the arm-holes of his silk-lined vest and nodded toward the door.

MacKeenon closed the door, locked it and came back to Fay's side. He passed the key toward Sir Richard, who motioned for him to lay it on the table.

"Now that everybody has had their say," said the chief, with an icy glitter in his eyes. "Now that they have," he continued, "I suppose it's my turn."

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"Fay, what did you do with the package you got from the safe?"

The question was shot directly at the cracksman. It was phrased so that there was no possible evasion.

It was a long minute before Fay answered. He laid both palms on the table and leaned toward Sir Richard as he said:

"What did I do with it — why, I threw it away!"

Sir Richard flushed hotly. He half rose from his chair. His thumbs came out of the arm-pits of his vest. He grasped the edge of the table and tilted his chair forward.

"Threw it away! What did you do that for? You got it and then threw it away?"

"Yes, I got it," Fay said between rigid lips. "I got what those German bunglers got — what Dutch Gus was after. I got the package and threw it into the North Sea. You sent me on a wild-goose chase — if ever there was one."

"How's that?"

"How! Why, damn it man, I'm no fool! Here I go after a strong-box, find that the outer door and the day door is ripped wide-open by a bunch of blacksmiths, beat them to the keister and get the package you sent me for — only to find that the package contains a cheap pair of smoked-glasses! A shilling pair, if ever there was one!"

Fay paused and stood erect. He whipped off his cap and, turning, glanced at Saidee Isaacs. She stepped forward and nodded confirmation. Fay went on:

"You've been badly gulled, Sir Richard! Mononson-

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burg, whose name was on the package, must have left the smoked-glasses at the embassy, and the report got to your people, as well as to the Germans, that it was the key to the cipher. I'm through with the whole mess! Send me back to Dartmoor!"

"Smoked-glasses?" repeated Sir Richard, rising and leaning over the table with his finger pointing like a gun at Fay.

"Yes — smoked-glasses! An ordinary pair of ordinary glasses!"

"And you threw them away?"

"Ask her," said Fay, turning to the girl.

The chief of the investigation bureau sat back, thrust his thumbs in his vest-holes, and whistled slowly. He closed his pursed lips and glared across the polished table. Inch by inch his eyes raised to the cracksman. For the first time since leaving the prison, Fay felt the grip of fear. There was that in the manhunter's eyes to warn him of coming danger.

He stepped back and away from the table. He came full into the level squint of MacKeenon's eyes. The air of the great room grew tense with things about to happen.

Saidee Isaacs gripped Fay's sleeve with a pressure of confidence.

"Tell him everything," she said in a low whisper.

MacKeenon stepped between the girl and Fay. He clicked the handcuffs suggestively as he dropped a hand into his coat pocket.

"Coom on," he said, bringing out the cuffs.

"No, Mac!" Sir Richard snapped. "Not yet!

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The smoked-glasses he threw away interest me — the trifle — lighter than air."

Fay shrugged his narrow shoulders and advanced to the table. He waited for Sir Richard to speak.

"Describe them," said the chief, leaning back. "What were those glasses like, Fay?"

"Ordinary! I saw nothing at all that would interest you in them. They were dark — almost opaque. They had cheap German-silver bows."

"Where are they now?" Sir Richard's voice held the grating edge of an inquisitor's.

"They're in the North Sea off the Holland coast. I'd say they went to the bottom in about thirty feet of water. I threw them off a cliff. She knows." Fay turned toward Saidee Isaacs.

"He did, Sir Richard," said the girl quickly. "He and I were together. We had rowed ashore from a sinking ship. I forget its name. Dutch Gus had the package and Chester took it from him. He sank the ship to get it."

"Ah," said the chief, "that was enterprise — at *any* rate. Now where on the Holland coast could I send a man to dive for the glasses?"

Fay glanced about the room. "If you get a good chart I'll show you," he said.

Sir Richard rubbed his hands. "That'll keep," he declared. "We'll remember it, though. Now, Fay, one other matter before I turn you over to MacKeenon."

"What is it?"

"How did it happen that you went to Arendal? What took you there?"

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"I was trying to connect with a man named Harry Raymond."

"Ace-in-the-hole Harry?"

"Yes! The deep-sea cardsharper!"

"What did you want to meet him for?"

"Last time I saw him he wore a pair of glasses like the pair I threw away on the Holland coast. Saidee made me go after him — or suggested that I should."

"No, it was his idea," said the girl staunchly.

"Whoever thought of it," Sir Richard said, "must have been sure there was some connection between the two pairs of glasses."

Fay caught the deduction which had caused the chief's remark. He felt like a felon before a Crown's counsel. He bit his upper lip and toyed with his cap which lay on the table. The bright cluster of bulbs over his head brought out the clean-cut details of Sir Richard's features.

He realized that the man whom he faced was the keenest ferret in all of Europe. The chief was balked, but only temporarily. There was no beating him. An inkling of the methods which had cost the underworld so many of its choicest lights came to Fay. He recalled that Foley the Goat had been caught by the mere matter of losing a coat-button. Then there was the Marble Arch affair, where Scotland Yard had brought home the crime to its instigators by the slender clue of five black hairs perfumed with a certain Italian hair-tonic which only one shop in Soho poured upon the heads of its customers.

Trifles had beaten the best-laid plans of those who

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lived beyond the law. And now the hounds were snarling over another trifle — as Sir Richard said — lighter than air. The chief had caught the thin wedge between the two pairs of smoked-glasses. He had guessed what Fay already knew. He glanced up at the cracksman and smiled broadly.

"So your friend, Harry-in-the-hole, wore the same kind of glasses? That simplifies matters. It may solve the cipher for us!"

"That's what *I* thought," said Fay positively.

Sir Richard stared at the ceiling and the bright electric cluster. "Let's see," he mused. "Ace-in-the-hole Harry — what an awful monacker, Fay — was arrested at the Crystal Palace for trimming a pigeon out of his shirt — almost. Then he appeared again at Bow Street charged with running a buffet flat in the West End — Brick Street, I think. They fleeced everybody there at banker and broker and baccarat, or was it chemin de fer?"

"Don't ask me," said Fay.

"He paid ten pounds fine, I think, and disappeared. Now, you say, he was on the boats with smoked-glasses. Then those glasses had some close relation to the cards. I think we're getting there —"

Sir Richard's right fingers crept to his vest pocket in abstraction. He stared at Saidee Isaacs and then dropped his eyes toward his vest. He brought out a small ring upon which was a single flat key. He toyed with this key as MacKeenon crept forward with the loose pouches of his leathern jaw hanging down.

"Bring me the boxes!" he said, pointing toward

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the three tin boxes which stood at the end of the table.

MacKeenon set them in front of Sir Richard.

"It may be, Mac," said the chief. "It may be that we have reached the end of the quest. There is something in what Fay has told us, after all. He's a bungler and a fool and all o' that, but he has enterprise. Suppose you go back to the coach house and tell the driver to give you those goggles from out the side pocket of the tonneau of the car that brought you down. I think I heard him take the car around the house. Tell him I want all of the goggles he has got."

The inspector glanced at Fay.

"Go on," said Sir Richard, "I'll watch him."

"Now you, Fay," the chief continued as MacKeenon unlocked the door and vanished through the hallway. "Fay, you can't steal! You're a shining mark for us. You've got the nerve of the damned — but you overlook the essential trifles. That finger print up over the transom in Hatton Gardens — for instance. The dropped hotel-key in Chicago — wasn't it? And now the smoked-glasses. You should not have thrown them away."

"She told me I shouldn't have done it," said Fay, turning toward Saidee Isaacs. He was surprised to notice that the girl had stepped halfway toward the door. Her eyes turned swiftly away from a spot on the wall. She nodded her head as Sir Richard glanced keenly at her.

"She told you, eh? She was right. A woman's intuition is a sound compass to steer by. Saidee has

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a clever brain — when she uses it. She helped get these for us."

Sir Richard pointed toward the first tin box. "She aided in getting them through Switzerland. She did well — but they are scraps of paper without the key that will solve them. That key may lie in the smoked-glasses. It may go deeper than that. You thought it was a trifle. Let me tell you, candidly, there are no trifles in this world. What do you wager that the trifle you threw away solves the secret of the entire German dye industry?"

"About three minutes start that it doesn't," said Fay as he glanced at the girl out of the corners of his eyes.

Sir Richard rubbed his hands and picked up the nearest box. He inserted the key as the little old man crept out of the gloom and came toward the table. Saidee Isaacs took one step in the direction of the door and the wainscoting near the chamfering. She stood pensively, with her hands at her sides as MacKeenon glided into the room and tossed a pair of yellow-tinted goggles upon the table.

Sir Richard picked up these goggles and lifted a sheet of paper out of the box. He held the glasses in one hand — the paper in the other. His eyes traveled over the lines of typing. He adjusted the goggles and leaned his head forward.

Slowly the chief's gaze ran from left to right and back again along the sheet. He fingered the goggles abstractedly. He moved his eyes closer to the page. He drew them away — a foot or more.

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"Not smoked enough," he said musingly. "These glasses won't do, I'm afraid. They're very weak. Very weak indeed."

Fay stood on the balls of his feet. He thrust a hand halfway out toward his cap which was between MacKeenon and the little old man. He waited then with every nerve strained to the leaping point.

Sir Richard glanced at the electric cluster, blinked his eyes, then resumed his scrutiny through the goggles of the typed page. He lifted a second sheet and peered at this. He seemed, to the poised cracksman, like a scientist examining a beetle with a double microscope. His brow darkened with a welling frown of annoyance. His chin lifted slightly. His glance darted toward Fay in final resolution. His eyes flamed.

"Mac, you may take him back to —" he started to say when Saidee Isaacs' fingers closed over the black knob of the switch which controlled all of the lights in the room. A click sounded like a revolver being cocked. The place was plunged into inky darkness. An exclamation of surprise came from the two detectives. This was followed by a gasp from Sir Richard. This last was mingled exasperation and wonder.

Fay heard, as he snatched up the cap and darted after Saidee Isaacs, the quick, braying of MacKeenon:

"He's goon, mon! Fay is goon!"

The inspector blundered against the half-closed door. He bumped his head in the darkness. Recoiling, he heard Sir Richard exclaim:

"Come here, Mac! Come here!"

Fay heard this cry as he leaped through the front

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door and sprang after the fleeing form of the girl. He wondered at the reason for it. His feet did not seem to touch the ground.

He gained her side as she crossed the dewy lawn of a garden and glided through box-wood hedges which led west and to another street than the one upon which was the House of the Two Lions.

"Are they following us?" she asked, turning her head and glancing at him. "Is anybody coming?" she repeated, breathing swiftly.

"No! No!" he answered, staring through the dark arch of green trees. "No, Saidee, they are not! No one has come out of the house. I don't understand why they didn't follow us — do you?"

"They've found something more important, then —" she said intuitively. "I believe they have found the key to the cipher!"

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CHAPTER XV

SOLVED

FAY valued his liberty too highly to turn back and search for the reason of the inaction of MacKeenon and Sir Richard Colstrom.

"This way," he said to Saidee Isaacs as he pointed toward a gravel-strewn roadway which wound around a red brick house. "Follow me and we'll work west where they can't find us."

"But — " she said, turning and looking back.

"No, come on! There may be a trick in the way they acted."

She followed him reluctantly. The thought had come to her that they were leaving something unanswered in the House of the Two Lions. She turned for a second time and sought it out. It showed dark and unimposing through the dew-laden branches of the trees.

Fay urged her on. Their progress after the girl's second back glance was a dodging one wherein he took every precaution. There were Bobbies about. Sir Richard had the entire night force of Scotland Yard to unleash upon their trail. The braying of the runners out of Vine Street might be heard at any moment.

Finally, as they stopped by a fern-covered crescent, a whistle shrilled which drove them into the shelter of a clump of box-wood. The silver notes were re-

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peated. They rang the air. They paled the girl's olive cheeks. She glanced eastward as if seeking protection from Sir Richard.

Turning toward Fay, she moved her lips inaudibly. He laughed with a sudden thought. The danger was only fancied.

A four-wheeler with an ancient nag between the shafts, clattered around a square. It drew up under a low arc light and took aboard a passenger who replaced his whistle in the pocket of his mackintosh.

"Two blasts," explained Fay, "brings a deep-sea cab. One — a hansom!"

She glanced up at a corner lamp and said:

"Kentwater Road! I'm not going any further!"

"Why?"

She turned and stared toward the east. "Do you remember Sir Richard saying 'Come here, Mac, come here?'"

"Yes, I do."

"What did he mean by that? Why didn't Mr. MacKeenon follow us? He could."

Fay hesitated. He went back over the scene in the great room where Saidee Isaacs had switched off the lights. "Yes, he could," he admitted finally. "I wonder why he didn't?"

Her hand grasped his overcoat sleeve. "I believe they found the cipher-key! Don't you see — they must have found it!"

"They found something more important than us."

"We're going back!"

"No! I don't think we had better do that."

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"Yes we are, Chester. We're going back and give ourselves up. Isn't your freedom less than the key to the cipher? Think what it will do to the world. Think of the benefit of it."

"I'd like to know," he admitted, staring in the direction of the House of the Two Lions. "I'd almost take a chance to find out."

"Come on back. We'll soon know. It's the only thing to do, Chester."

He felt her arm within his own. They retraced their steps. A motor car with H.M.S. plates dashed swiftly by them. A second car turned into the street upon which was the House of the Lions. It was evident that something of moment had happened. Fay thought he recognized a familiar figure in the tonneau of the first car. The man, whoever it was, held the steady poise of a prime minister.

Fay stopped and drew Saidee Isaacs into the cove of a hedge. He glanced out and south along the street upon which was the House of the Lions. Three great motors stood there with their flaming electrics burning cones of fire in the night. A figure in tweed passed up the stairway and was admitted through the front door.

"That may have been the Prime Minister," said Saidee Isaacs.

Fay stared upward at the leaden vault of the London sky. He was between two minds. The House of the Lions might be a cunningly-baited trap of the superior order.

"Come on, Saidee," he said, throwing away his last

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resolve for safety. "We'll go in the house. We'll see Sir Richard. If it's a trap — they'll never give me another chance for a get-away."

She thrust her hands in the pockets of her skirt and leaned toward him.

"I never knew Sir Richard to play false," she said. "He's too smart a man to do anything like that. I don't think we needed to run away."

Fay arched his brows. He followed her down the sidewalk and turned with her into the pathway which led to the House of the Lions. He stood on the steps as she knocked lightly. The three motors were blocking the road. Their chauffeurs were huddled in the front seats waiting for orders. They all had the appearance of sincerity. Fay entered the door after the girl.

Sir Richard beamed through the gloom of a half-illuminated hallway. "Ah, my runaways!" he chuckled. "Come right in! We've company of note tonight — a cracksman, a lady of class, a Prime Minister, an M. P. and the Secretary of the Home Office. I want you to meet them, Fay. They are terribly interested in how you found the secret of the German dye-cipher. You should have stayed until the discovery," he added with cryptic smiling.

Fay allowed the girl to precede him through the doorway which opened into the large room where stood three men who held themselves like Empire-builders. These men stared curiously at Sir Richard as he motioned for MacKeenon and the little Scotch detective to take places at the door.

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The chief of the investigation bureau rounded the table, drew up a chair and sat down. He leaned forward and fastened upon Saidee Isaacs and Fay the level scrutiny of a man who was vastly pleased with the turn of affairs. He rubbed his hands and beamed upon the company. In some manner, his strong jaw had softened. The bulges at the sides were not so prominent.

"Germany," he began speaking, "is checkmated. All that sad country knows about making dyes shall now be known to England and America. The secret is out!"

The smaller member of the group of three men, whom Fay surmised was the Prime Minister who had fought Germany to a knock-out, stepped to the table and threw back the lid of the nearest tin box. He brought forth a sheet of paper between his steady, well-manicured fingers. He held it out with a smile.

Sir Richard reached for this sheet as he darted a sly aside toward Fay.

"We have here," said the chief, "an ordinary piece of fairly good typewriting paper. It was made in Germany. It contains thirty-two lines of letters — grouped three letters together. They read 'aaahhhsssaaacccstopxxxgggsssttttstopmmmwww' and so on. It has long been suspected that the cipher was written between the lines or on the back of the sheets. No chemical reaction that we tried brought any satisfactory result. We tried them all. It remained for chance to solve the puzzle in a satisfactory manner."

Sir Richard glanced at the cluster of lights that

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bathed the room in white. He blinked and held out the sheet. He reached and picked up the pair of tinted goggles which MacKeenon had brought from the stable.

"These glasses," he said, "are not sufficiently opaque to answer the purpose. Fay," he added with a twinkle, "you are to be complimented on your enterprise. You *took* that safe, in the country north and east of here, like Haig took Cambrai. You held the secret. You lost it and gained it again. You threw it away and then thought better of the matter when you followed the cardsharper to see why he wore smoked-glasses. I know why he wore them!"

"Why?" said Fay quickly.

"Because he's a genius in his own peculiar line. I hope to have the pleasure of sending him away sometime. With the kind of glasses he wears, no man is safe in a friendly poker game."

Fay stared at Saidee Isaacs. She crimsoned over the memory of the thirty-odd pounds she had lost to Harry Raymond.

"I'd like to know how he does it?" she asked.

Sir Richard laid the sheet of paper on the table. He tossed the tinted glasses to one side as he rose and pointed toward the snap-switch on the wainscoting.

"Turn it off, Mac," he said. "Put this room in complete darkness. Then we'll all see the answer to the puzzle. It was too simple for the best cipher experts in the world to solve."

The inspector reached upward and snapped off the switch. The room was plunged into Stygian darkness.

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Fay widened his eyes and tried to make out details. There was a glow from the side windows which gradually brought out shadows.

"Come here, Chester," commanded Sir Richard. "Come around the table and stand by my side. Look over my shoulder and tell me what you see on the paper. Keep yours eyes shaded with your hands to shut out all light. Now, what d'you see?"

Fay rounded the table and glided to Sir Richard's side. He leaned over and strained his eyes as he stared blankly at the paper.

He saw nothing but fine black lines at first. He cupped his palms and pressed them to his temples. He moved his head back and forth from the page.

"Keep at it!" said Sir Richard with a positive chuckle.

Fay strained his glance. He saw then the first white glow of fire which moved phosphorescently between the typed-lines. It steadied. It disappeared. It came again — this time more prominently.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "It's there!"

"Yes," said Sir Richard. "It *is* there! What do you make out between the first and second line? Be careful, don't touch the paper. That's it — what do you make out?"

"*Werke-Maintz*," said Fay.

"Go on — it reads easy after your eyes accustom themselves to the dark. What's between the next lines of typing?"

"*Der est . . . Blau die . . . Alizarine . . . Sapphire* . . . H_2SO_4 . . . HNO_3 —"

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"And the next?"

"*Carbanthrene Blau . . .?*"

"Yes, and indigo and all the fast colors are there. They are worked out to the minutest details and formulae. They throw the field wide open to the world. There will be no more secret dyes!"

Sir Richard grasped Fay's right arm and continued:

"D'you see the trick, now? The trifle — lighter than any air? D'you see what baffled the cipher experts of four countries for two years?"

"Yes, I see it, now," said Fay. "The formulae are written in radium."

"Radium salt, which is white, upon white paper!" blurted Sir Richard. "The only way you could *ever* see it — is in the dark!"

Fay straightened his back. He tried to pierce the gloom in the direction of Saidee Isaacs. He glanced down at the table. The sheet of paper had been whisked away by Sir Richard, who placed it in the box.

MacKeenon switched on the light. The room was filled with dazzling brilliancy. Sir Richard pointed to the sheath of cipher papers which were piled in the tin containers.

"See anything there now?" he asked Fay.

The cracksman passed his hand over his eyes and stared at the topmost sheet. The cipher-writing had vanished. The lines of letters, which had been typed for a blind, alone showed.

"Now I know," sad Fay, "how Ace-in-the-hole Harry worked the gulls on the passenger boats. He

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wore heavy smoked glasses and marked the backs of the cards with phosphor or luminous paint. It was the same thing as putting the light out — as far as he was concerned."

"The trifles!" chuckled Sir Richard. "You threw Mononsonburg's key away. Those glasses were thick enough and dark enough to read the writing on the sheets in daylight. The secrets of the German dyes are written between the lines by a fine pen dipped in radium salts."

The Prime Minister drew out a flat watch and consulted it. He turned toward two men high in the Government whom Sir Richard had called.

"Gentlemen," he said, "we must be going. Sir Richard has entertained us exceedingly. I'd sum the matter up by saying everything was tried except putting out the light. But then, who would have thought of so simple a thing as that?"

Sir Richard nodded to Saidee Isaacs.

"She thought of it!" he exclaimed. "The credit goes to her. I've no doubt she thought she was helping a pal — but she did more than that."

Fay thrust his hands into the side pockets of his coat and declared: "You're right, Sir Richard! That little lady did us a good turn. I don't see how Scotland Yard can get along without a woman inspector or two. I never heard anybody say that a member of the fair sex would overlook a trifle."

The Prime Minister was in the act of placing his hat on his head. He bowed, instead, and passed Saidee Isaacs as he stepped toward the door. He was followed

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by the silent members of his Government. The door remained open. The great motors throbbed with life. The clash of their gears woke echoes in the house as they started away.

MacKeenon and the little old Scot remained in the doorway. They glanced at Fay and the girl. Their eyes swung toward Sir Richard, who had seated himself in the chair which was before the three cipher boxes.

Keen-sniffing, the two detectives waited for the order. A chain clicked in the inspector's side pocket. He shifted his weight to his right foot. He glanced for a second time at Sir Richard.

"Mac!"

MacKeenon started and stood erect.

"Mac," repeated Sir Richard. "Mac, you may take these three boxes, with the cipher solved, over to the big safe in Scotland Yard. Give them to Cragen, who will be responsible for them."

The inspector hesitated and glanced at Fay.

"Go on, Mac!" said Sir Richard sternly. "Do what I say. You and Simpson shall guard them over. Leave me alone with Fay and the girl. Shut the door when you go out."

Fay watched the two baffled Scots lift the tin boxes, cram them under their arms and start down the hallway. The door slammed. MacKeenon, in passing, had kicked it with his foot.

Saidee Isaacs bobbed her hat and flashed a glance at the door. She turned and walked toward Sir Richard. She paused and stood in the center of the room. The

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chief of the Criminal Investigation Division had dropped his chin on his breast in an attitude of profound abstraction.

Fay softly moved to the girl's side. The two remained silent and thoughtful over the period of a long minute. They watched Sir Richard like quick-witted children. Their eyes, although different in color, contained the same steady stare.

"You were a fool," suddenly said the chief without lifting his chin. "You blundered and blundered and blundered, Fay. You did everything wrong. And yet everything wrong came out all right in the end. I think I'll have to both condemn and praise you."

Saidee Isaacs took one quick step toward the table. Fay stopped her with a reaching arm. There was a quizzical smile on the cracksman's face. He had read Sir Richard aright.

"I think —" started the chief of the investigation division, "I think that you are just a bad boy grown up."

Sir Richard sat bolt upright. He leveled a steady finger across the polished surface of the table.

"You're a fool in a fool's paradise. You can't move contrary to fifty million people, and get away with it. There is a place for such who break the laws — a house with a Thousand Doors! What have you got to say, Fay? Do you want to go back to Dartmoor — or do you square it?"

Fay reached upward, fingered his lapel and removed the little silver greyhound. He tossed it to the table

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with a quick jerk of his wrist. He stood with folded arms.

"I'm ready to go," he said, "if you won't trust me —, all the time!"

The chief's eyes narrowed to slits of steel. His fingers reached across the table and snatched up the insignia of the King's couriers.

"Come here," he said to Saidee Isaacs.

She glanced at Fay, then moved around the table and stood at Sir Richard's side.

"You may take this trifle of esteem and fasten it upon Chester's lapel, again," the chief said. "We always have a place for men like him."

Fay overheard the order and stepped swiftly forward.

"I'll take it," he said, "on one promise. Just one!"

"And what is that promise I'm to give?" asked Sir Richard smilingly.

"On your solemn word that you'll trust me next time you send me out on a mission."

"My word for that, Chester. You're too high-spirited to lead the life you were leading. You'll have your chance now. The war is over — peace has been signed — but England and your country are just coming into their own. Look at Mesopotamia and Arabia and Africa — look at Russia and the Balkans. We've got to send men there for certain purposes. You'll do nicely! There's no better commission in the world than the one I offer you. It's free-lancing!"

"I'll take it," said Fay.

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Saidee Isaacs glided forward and pinned the little silver greyhound back on his left lapel. She stepped away with her head thrown high.

Sir Richard leaned over the table. "There's moderate expenses goes with that," he said. "Now you'll be getting salutes from the Bow Street runners instead of dodging them. Are you satisfied with the turn of affairs?"

Fay smiled as he hooked his arm with Saidee Isaacs. "We're going now," he said. "I'll report tomorrow. I'll be subject to your call in all cases except putting men in prisons — I draw a line at that — Sir Richard."

"Good-by!" boomed the chief. "Good-by, Saidee! See that he watches his step!"

Fay opened the door and led her down the hallway. They stood on the porch between the lions. They passed down the gravel walk.

Turning and glancing back, she said:

"Sir Richard is a gentleman!"

Fay raised his left hand and fingered the little silver greyhound. He was silent as he led her northward and then toward the West End of London. They both heard the chimes of Big Ben on the House of Parliament. Its notes were striking over the housetops of the city.

They passed through deep aisles of yews and poplars and sturdy English oaks. They reached Rose Crescent and the road which led to the river. Their arms were linked as a policeman stepped out from a clump of box-wood and eyed them intently.

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Fay saluted with his left hand to his plaid cap. The "Bobby" stood with his great red palms on his knees. He smiled slowly — broadly.

They vanished in the gloom of Rose Crescent — merged as one. The Bobby sighed. He could not have drawn down a fairer picture of contentment had he called upon the highest stars.

THE END

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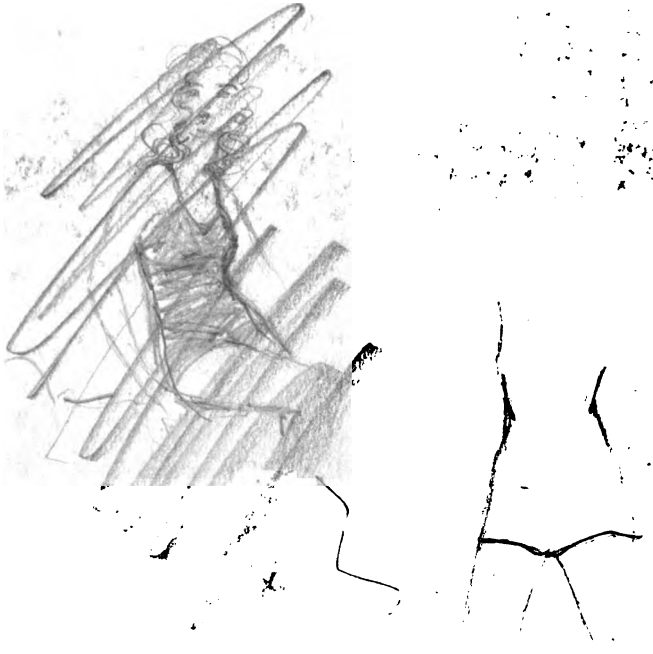

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